

THE SEA HAWK



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THE SEA HAWK

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By
BAILEY MILLARD



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PART I.

A PURITAN PIRATE

THE SEA HAWK

CHAPTER I

THE GIRL OF THE "THETIS"

Buoys were bobbing gently in the outrunning tide; the endless straggle of shoredrift was lazing down the creek; round, water-washed cocoa husks twinkled and darkled in the stream, like the heads of so many swimmers; here was a sea-worn piece of planking, there a splintered spar, and, floating amid it all, was a cedar canoe in which a bareheaded young man, with an easy, self-confident look in his frank, likeable face, steadily and neatly plied the paddle, his glinting blue-gray eyes glancing sharply from right to left to mark what heartless tug captain might be aiming to run him down. For at times there were many towing masters speeding their stout boats about in Oakland Creek and the blue San Francisco bay beyond, and from the viewpoint of a man in a fourteen-foot canoe they were all desperate murderers.

But no screw now beat through the peaceful tide near the lone boatman, and he had that part of

the bay-arm all to himself, save for the driftage and the bobbing buoys.

After a while the young man laid down his paddle, folded his bare arms and looked forward with a steady gaze that seemed full of throbbing anticipation. But he appeared to be biding his time, as though that for which he would seek was not yet to unfold itself to his view. Had he not been so tensely preoccupied it would have been delicious indolence, this drifting bayward with the tide. The summer sun lay red and low in the fog-murk beyond Yerba Buena Island, but overhead the air was clear and wonderfully soft. On the left of the man in the canoe brooded the darkly mysterious marshlands, with a world of waving tules; away forward swelled the tame and sober billows of the bay; to the right were musty wharves, scraggy lumber piles and prosaic coal yards; behind him crooked the turbid creek, yellow with harbor ooze and flecked with the trivial flotsam.

Not far astern, in a wider stretch of water, rose a bristle of masts past which he had just paddled—half-dismantled clipper ships of the old Cape Horn line, stout whalers, with beamy hulls, stubby sticks and heavily obvious davits—vessels that had always made a strong appeal to his imagination; and, strangely mixed with these Artic-goers, were the schooners *Honolulu*, *Belle of Tahiti* and others from far Southern climes that had made him dream of palms and coral isles. Indeed, there had

been hours when, after the irritating fiasco of some late-at-night electrical experiment in his little laboratory (he had a new plan for wireless transmission which had not yet worked itself out) a placid, nerve-soothing morning's paddle among these Southern voyagers had made Edwin Tevis feel that he would not mind casting in his lot among them. But always he had returned to his batteries and commutators with that determination to "win out" which had been one of his leading characteristics in the college where he had mastered the awful "math" that had gained for him his electrical engineer's diploma. It was this same determination that had caused him to accept, albeit with a bite of the lip, a house-wiring and bell-hanging position in an Oakland shop; for two years out of college had amply demonstrated the dismaying yet impressive fact that he must earn a living, even by humble means, until such time as he might perfect his invention or pin down one of those yet evasive opportunities to build a great power-plant or a trolley line.

Not always had Tevis been obliged to consider ways and means. He could well remember the time when his father owned rich quartz mines in Calaveras County, and many of the men in the freshman class had stood in awe of the only son of Ready-Money Tevis, who for years was one of three mining men who had sent the most gold to the mint. But gold had brought nothing but bane to the elder Tevis. He had always been a light

tippler, and when his prosperity was at its highest he became a heavy one. He died of acute alcoholism when Edwin was in his junior year, after hopelessly tangling up his affairs. Mrs. Tevis followed her husband to the grave a week later. So reduced did the young man's finances become that he had barely enough money left to see him through college, which accounted for the taking of the electrical course.

Anyone looking at him now as he sat in his canoe, gazing eagerly across the water, would hardly have thought those bright, steady eyes had seen so much of sorrow; but one did not have to be a close observer to note a few touches of white at the temples of the bare brown head that made a strange contrast with his strong, youthful face and gave depth to the interest which even strangers had often felt in him at first sight. Those touches of white had appeared in his hair in that week when his mother was killed by his father's downfall.

After floating along a little way with the tide, the young man picked up his paddle and dipped gently forward under the bows of a hulking Britisher whose red water-line showed high above the surface. He heard the clank of hammers upon rivet-heads and plates where the vessel was being repaired amidships. Then he paddled ever so slowly toward a trim steam yacht the lustrous bulk of which now appeared ahead, shining above the dirty ooze like a clean, white dove in a cowyard. Truly

the *Thetis* was as neat a thing as one might wish to see upon the water—a handy boat of about four hundred tons, fit to sail anywhere.

But it was not merely for the sake of a peep at this beautiful boat that the young man was paddling toward her as she lay there in the red eye of the setting sun. In truth, there was that patrician air about her which had irritated him somewhat when he had first clapped eyes upon her while drifting down the creek a week before. But he would have been free to confess that two minutes after the first time he had paddled over to the *Thetis* he was ready to accept the yacht and all aboard her on their own terms.

For there in a wicker chair under the after awning had sat a dark-eyed, adorable girl, with jetty hair, a sweet face, tanned by the sun of the sea and the salt winds, and with a rather slight, though exquisitely moulded form that was distinctly maidenly and yet of a truly womanly model.

When he had first observed her, the girl of the yacht had looked up from a book in her lap and glanced at him with a little start of surprise. Edwin Tevis, clean-cut, stalwart and fresh-looking, in his crisp, fastidious shirt, with its uprolled sleeves, neat collar and tie and his belted khaki trousers, was a man very likely to claim more than a passing glimpse from any woman, young or old. His sudden appearance within biscuit-throw of the deck had surprised from her a definite look of approval. For an instant his knowing blue eyes

met hers with a flash of frank admiration, and there was a quickening of his pulses, as if they had been touched by a certain urge of the blood, an urge that was well-nigh irresistible, and yet must be denied, though it prompted him to protract his gaze beyond the conventional bounds. But as her eyes fell before his and as she quickly proceeded, in her well-bred way, to ignore him by returning to her book, there was, of course, no further sign between them save this vaguely stirring one. Tevis had paddled slowly on, with only now and then a quickly stolen glance backward at the yacht where the girl still sat quietly and coolly in her wicker chair under the awning.

This divine creature, the most beautiful girl he had ever seen, who was she? He must see her again, he must know her!

That was the first time. On the second, third and fourth times when he had paddled softly and reverently past the *Thetis*, always in the evening when his shop-work was over, he had seen nothing of the young woman though his eye had been subtly alert for her; and each time he had distinctly felt the loss of her trim, neatly modeled figure out of the pretty marine picture made by the yacht as she rode at anchor on the placid creek.

So closely had he regarded the persons on deck in his various paddlings about the yacht that he had come to know some of them by sight, particularly the sprucely dressed captain and a large man with a red face and a trim, pointed beard, who,

from the cut of his clothes, and more particularly by his great "haw-haw," which could be heard for a quarter-mile in the still evening air, Tevis had set down as an Englishman. In vain, however, had he looked for the girl. Perhaps she had been only a visitor on the yacht and he might never see her again. Still, he could not help looking for her every evening as he plied his paddle up and down the sleepy creek.

On the fourth evening he had given her up, and had come to the dismaying conclusion that he should never again be blest by the sight of her; but this glorious fifth time, while the *Thetis* lay in the ebbing tide, his eye caught the flutter of her white skirt under the awning and his heart was glad.

As he paddled a little nearer, circling astern of the white craft, he became aware of a curious change in the driftage that was going out with the tide. From cocoa husks, dead tules, splinters and planks it had changed to green and yellow globes that dotted all the waterscape. Melons—hundreds of them! They had probably been thrown overboard from an up-river schooner whose consignee had jettisoned the cargo rather than flood the market and lower the prices.

As the canoe swung slowly astern of the yacht, Tevis saw the girl looking curiously down at the melon patch. This prodigal strewing of fruit upon the waters was no doubt a strange sight to her. A large, hulking sailor in white pushed off in the ship's dingey, and was picking up canteloupes and

watermelons, one by one, and disgustedly throwing them back into the creek.

"This is a great note!" Tevis heard him say. "They ain't no good—all got holes in 'em. But they're fresh-lookin' enough. It's mighty strange. They must 'a chipped 'em so nobody would want 'em, the muckers! Ah, here's a good 'un. No, blamed if it ain't scuttled, too."

The tide and his slow, unwilling paddle were moving Tevis away now, along with the melons. He gazed over the stern of his canoe at the girl of the *Thetis*, but she gave him no more than a glance or two. The sun blotted itself out below the island, and in the twilight he rowed back, paddling stoutly now, as he was breasting a strong current.

Had he been able to look into her eyes just then he would have seen a gleam of admiration in them as they demurely regarded him from under their soft fringes. For the girl was uncommonly pleased by the sturdy ease with which he flexed his bare brown arms, by the stout, swinging rhythm of his long, masterful sweeps of the paddle and the delicate, sure feathering of it that sent the canoe flying straight as a conical bullet.

He was a little reluctant to look up, as he did not wish to seem to be rudely staring at her. But when he had passed the stern of the *Thetis*, venturing quite close this time, he gazed back. There she was, blithe and winsome as ever, chirping a little song that sounded ever so sweet upon the

evening air. So rapt was he in the contemplation of her pure profile, as she looked townward across the water, that he relaxed his stroke and paddled slowly away like a man in a state of hypnosis superinduced by the rare vision of her.

Of a sudden there was a slight bump at his bow and a booming yell:

"Hey, there, you lubber! What d'ye mean by runnin' me down this way? I'll smash that canoe for you, that's what I will!"

These pleasant words were immediately followed by a smart blow upon Tevis' head from the flat of an oar. Whether the knock was intentional or not was all the same to the young man's quick blood. Hotly and rather dizzily, he reached out, grasped the wet oar-blade and almost wrenched it from the hand that had wielded it against him, recklessly risking the upsetting of the canoe. There in the rocking dingey was the big sailor whose melon salvage had been so disappointing. He commanded Tevis to let go the oar, giving it another tug, as he did so, and nearly sending them both into the water. Still hot and dizzy from the blow, Tevis grimly held on, with a vague punitive notion in his bedazed head. But soon the man in the dingey got some sort of sailor's twist to bear, and the slippery blade would have run through Tevis' fingers, but that he ducked his head and grasped the oar well forward of the flat end, tugging desperately and bringing the two boats smart-

ly together. While the boatmen struggled the canoe rocked violently and once almost capsized.

“You won’t let go, eh?” the man in the dingey bellowed, fiercely; and before Tevis could sense his action he had leaned over into the canoe, and, with a lupine lunge of his head, sunk his sharp fangs into the young man’s forearm, bringing the red blood out with a spurt. Tevis loosed the teeth-hold by a handy blow on the man’s jaw. Then, quickly looping his painter into a ring at the stern of the dingey, he sprang lightly aboard it and with all the urge of his young spirit, made at the man, bent upon instant revenge.

After a little tentative give-and-take, while the two boats side-wiped the yacht, Tevis sprang at his man, and clamping his stout fingers, about the loose-shirted waist of him, he yanked him toward the stern of the dingey, his long body toppling neatly across the thwarts, threshing in the stalwart young fellow’s hard grasp and finally coming down under him upon the clean bottom planks, where he lay gasping between his knees. It may have been that he sat upon his fallen foeman rather rudely, and certainly the throat-hold he now had upon him was not a gentle one; but if the man under him had been anything but the great-sheep that he was he would not have bleated and bawled as he did:

“Help, boys, help!” he gurgled throatily. “He’s chokin’ me. He’s killin’ me! He’s desperit, he is!”

A wild cry rang from the girl of the *Thetis*:

"Don't hurt him, don't!" she called to Tevis imploringly, her face as white as the skirt she wore.

"Oh," said he, looking up at her as she leaned over the rail, and speaking as calmly and reassuringly as he could. "I don't intend to injure him. He has probably learned his lesson by this time."

As he said this he let go the prostrate man's throat, and, rising, stood over him rather unguardedly. He was not a little embarrassed by the show of hostility that had been necessary on his part. To have come to fisticuffs in the presence of this charming young creature was deplorable. But, as it turned out, he acted upon these delicate considerations rather too hastily, for his prostrate foe shared none of them.

"You saw how it was," Tevis went on, gazing up at the girl—"how the affair began?"

"Oh, yes!" said she, "I saw it all, and he shouldn't have been so—— Look out! Look out!"

At that instant he felt a hard grip about his ankles. The savage man had seized them tightly, with the evident intention of tripping him and throwing him overboard. The dingey was rolling wildly, the gunwales scooping water. With his legs well braced, Tevis leaned over and tried to grapple the man in turn, but only in a defensive way. He could have struck him in the face had he cared to, and thus ended his foul tackling, but

he still felt the constraining presence of the girl. So he merely gripped the fellow's shoulders while she cried out, her voice now sounding a little farther away, as the tide carried the boat astern with the canoe in tow:

"Oh, dear! Oh, dear! Will nobody stop this terrible fight? Sir Charles! Sir Charles! They'll kill each other. Why don't you men forward there *do* something?"

Tevin had caught a glimpse of the "men forward," whose grins fully evidenced their hearty appreciation of the fight.

There were hurrying feet on the deck and the round red face of the Britisher whom Tevin had before noted on the yacht glared over the rail, through a glittering monocle.

"I say, my men, what's all the row?" cried the Briton. "Here, you fellow, break away! Let our man alone! He's a peaceable sailor. I'll have you run in."

"Oh, yes, he's peaceable," panted Tevin, without taking his wary eyes off his man. He's——"

The great brute pushed heavily to one side, giving the boat a mighty lurch, which threw the young man over the gunwale and into the water, while at the same time his fierce antagonist let go his ankles, with a shove that sent him down like a piece of pig iron. When he rose, spluttering, with a quart of muddy water gurgling inside him, he was near the dingey. He threw out his hand to clutch the side; but at that moment down came the

club-end of an oar upon his unguarded head. There was a great buzzing in his brain, as of a mighty machine, a gurgling in his ear, a raspy feeling in throat and nostrils, a far-away throb-throb-throbbing, and then the stark emptiness of a mind inert!

CHAPTER II

ROMANCE REVERSED

"It was a bully scrap, that's what it was, but a mighty unfair one. That Bill Jenkins is the most cowardly cuss. Steward, he's opening his eyes. He's all right!"

"Yes, he's all right."

"Tevis blinked in the fierce glow of an incandescent light in the little cabin. It seemed as though it would blind him. His head ached, his lungs were sore, but there was a quick revival of the spirit, so that presently he bobbed his head up and, though all abroad at first, he soon took in the situation. It seemed natural enough that he should find himself aboard ship, so much had the *Thetis* been in his mind of late.

"Where is he—where's that fighting fellow?" he demanded.

"Jenkins?" said the sleek-faced steward. "Don't bother about him. He's vamoosed—dead scared of the lock-up, I guess."

"Am I on the yacht?"

"You are, but you came near being on the bottom of the creek by this time. How does your head feel—pretty rotten, eh? That was a nasty knock

he gave you with his oar. He's the foulest fighter that ever went to sea—a regular stingaree, don't you think?"

"I certainly think," said Tevis grimly; "but all the same, if you'll take his oars and clubs and things away from him, I'll go ashore with the beast and give him the soundest walloping he ever had."

"I guess you ain't afraid of him," said the steward, smiling, "and I'd give a heap to see the mill, but the Captain will fix him all right, if he catches him—knocking people in the head with oars—and all before Miss Braisted, too. He'll get what's comin' to him, don't worry about that."

"That's what he will," said the other man, "if they catch him."

There was a light footfall outside the cabin door and a sweet voice asked solicitously:

"How is he?" It was the voice of the girl of the yacht.

"He's come around, miss. He's all right now."

"Thank you, I'm awfully glad to hear it," said the girl graciously. "See that he doesn't want for anything, and let him rest all he will."

She went away. Soon afterward Tevis thrust his legs out of the bunk, and sat up, with his hands to his head.

"Don't worry about me," he said to the steward. "I'm going ashore. I've bothered you folks enough. It wasn't your fault that that fellow was such a crazy-horse. Where's my canoe?"

“She’s tied alongside. She’s all right.”

The steward tried to induce Tevis to stay on board until morning, but he was all for getting ashore. His head throbbed, but before long he felt fit to take care of himself, though somewhat dubious as to his clothes which were wet and unwearable.

When, about eight in the evening, he left the steward’s cabin, dry and clean, in an odd assortment of old toggery—a pair of dark-blue trousers, a world too wide and with a broad white stripe running down the leg, and a frayed smoking-jacket of a faded wine color, strangely patterned and padded and also grotesquely loose, he was conducted by the steward toward the companion. The way was along a passage and through the brilliantly lighted, wonderfully carved and paneled saloon.

“You needn’t direct me any further, steward,” said Tevis, as he sighted the stairway at the other end of the saloon. “Thank you very much. You’ve been awfully good to me, and I shall never forget it. Good-bye!”

“Good-bye, sir!” said the steward, turning back down the passage.

With his bundle of soggy clothing, in his hand, Tevis took a few steps forward and, hearing a jingle of piano-strings, paused, awkwardly conscious of his strange dress. For there at a piano at the other end of the saloon, with her back toward him and close to the companion, which, as

far as he knew, was his sole means of escape, was the lustrous girl of the yacht in evening dress. Near her on a divan was the big, red-faced, Englishman whom she had called "Sir Charles" on deck and who had remonstrated with Tevis during the battle in the boats. Sir Charles was also faultlessly attired. With what to Tevis was intolerable solicitude he addressed the young woman as "Hazel," which he voted at once as an undue familiarity. He had never known a girl named Hazel. It was a neat name and he liked it.

As he stood hesitating the girl turned and, seeing him in his motley garb, burst forth in a light laugh which she immediately suppressed with her dainty finger-tips, while her liquid brown eyes, still possessed of the spirit of girlish merriment, looked at him from across the saloon. It was unbearable to him that his odd appearance should seem so irresistibly piquant to this beautiful vision of young womanhood that had floated so seraphically in and out of his dreams. Her laughter pricked his proud spirit. There was this, though, about her laugh—it made her seem a little more like the girls he knew. There had seemed something distinctly divine and unapproachable about her before; but that light, tinkling laugh of hers was essentially human. It gave him courage to say, with a slight note of injury:

"I am very sorry to have given you all this trouble. I didn't want to alarm you or bother you, but the fight was forced upon me, as you saw

Thank you very much, indeed, for your kindness. Thank you and good-bye!"

Her face changed instantly and her brown eyes took on a sober tone.

"I'm awfully sorry it happened," she said, with becoming concern. "The man is a brute and ought to be in jail. He's always looking for trouble. I don't know why the captain has kept him so long. If it's any satisfaction to you, you may rest assured that his term of service on this yacht is over." This with the air of one in whom resided authority.

There were a few commonplaces and a casual remark or two from Sir Charles. Whenever the girl looked at Tevis she smiled roguishly, showing an array of dazzling teeth in one of which there was a little glint of gold. But to Tevis the aristocratic, monocled Sir Charles was a snow man in evening dress. The Britain addressed none of his talk to him and only once or twice did his cold gray eyes look his way, when his expressionless stare seemed calculated to make a snow man of Tevis in turn. He had a feeling that he would like to crush that monocle. But what was even less bearable—intolerant, in fact—was the ill-suppressed mirth of the girl. He felt his face burn as he said "Good-bye" again and left the saloon, glancing back as he did so into the mischievously laughing eyes that had caught a rearward and newly ridiculous view of his wine-colored jacket and all-too-ample trousers. But beyond her

shoulder Sir Charles, the snow man, sat as rigid and refrigerant as ever.

When he reached the deck the free air gave him a wonderful accession of spirits, probably aided a little by the temper he was in over the girl's too keen sense of humor. He was told by the first officer that the Captain had wished to see him before he left the yacht. The Captain had gone ashore to meet the owner and Tevis was told he had better stay until his return, which would be soon. But the young man was in no mood to wait. He got into his canoe a little stiffly, his head-pang still reminding him of the combat. Just as he was paddling away from the yacht in the bright moonlight, Sir Charles must have come on deck, for he heard him gruff out:

"Gad, what an extraordinary affair!"

Precisely what had been said or done to bring forth this cool remark, which was doubtless intended for Tevis' ears, could not be guessed by the young man, but it made him set his teeth defiantly. He paddled ashore with a quick stroke, his wet clothes dripping from the stern. Over the quiet water there came the rumble of men's voices from the yacht, and once he heard the heavy "Haw-haw" of the baronet.

Of a sudden the voices ceased as the men went below. A few minutes later, looking back in the moonlight, Tevis saw the white skirt of the girl of the *Thetis*. She was standing on the upper

deck and clear of the shadow of the awning. He wondered if her eyes were following him ashore.

When he reached the long, empty dock, he saw one of the yacht's boats lying alongside a float by the steps, with two of the crew in it.

"There's the canoe chap now," he heard one sailor say.

"Yes, that's him," said another.

When the boy at the dock had taken charge of his canoe, Tevis climbed the steps wearily. A man was about to descend. As he came down he recognized him in the moonlight as the Captain of the *Thetis*, whom he had seen several times aboard the yacht when he had paddled about her, eager for a glimpse of the girl. The Captain was followed by a stoutish gentleman who wore a white waistcoat and was smoking a cigar. An arc light that flashed from the pier made their faces plain to him.

"Good evening," came the Captain's greeting. "You're the man who was in the fight, aren't you? How do you feel now? Did they take care of you aboard? I told them to."

"Oh, I'm all right," said Tevis. "How's Jenkins? What became of him?"

"He's skipped off ashore," said the Captain significantly, "and I guess he'll stay there. He'll never do any more fighting aboard or about the *Thetis*."

He went back up the steps with Tevis to where the stout gentleman stood on the wharf—a smooth-

ly groomed elderly man whose air bespoke an easy command of affairs. He seemed bland enough when, after the Captain's explanation of Tevis, he asked with friendly concern:

"Can we do anything for you, young man? I wasn't aboard when it happened, but Captain Dumble has told me all about the mix-up in the boat, how you were nearly drowned, and the part my daughter played in the matter."

His daughter! She was his daughter! Then he was a man to be respected. There was no room for doubt in Tevis' mind that he was face to face with the owner of the *Thetis*.

"It was certainly not your fault," the gentleman went on, "and you were very harshly treated. The fellow should have been arrested. As he was one of our crew I thought we owed you——"

"Oh," said Tevis, bent on checking any benevolent scheme he might be evolving on his account, "don't bother about it. It's all over now, and I think I got in a few punches that Mr. Jenkins will remember."

"You look as though you could give a good account of yourself," said Hazel's father. "But by the way, Captain, you didn't introduce us."

"My name is Tevis," said the young man, "Edwin Tevis."

"Tevis? I know a banker back East named Tevis."

"He's probably no relation of mine," was the

reply. "My family haven't had much to do with the banks of late years."

"May be they're just as well off," said the other sighing, and Tevis fancied he understood the significance of the sigh. A look into the face of this over-prosperous possessor of yachts and other highly-esteemed luxuries, under the glowing arc light, seemed to reveal to him a spirit dominated by a vague misgiving, though it was well supported by the dignity of dollars—a dignity which the young man had held rather cheap. "My name is Braisted," he went on, "and this is Captain Dumble."

The Captain bowed. Tevis, in returning the salutation, trusted that the shadows were subduing the picturesqueness of his oddly matched suit. He was uneasy and was all for making away and getting home; but he felt himself held by their talk and lived for the moment in their polite expectancy.

"Mr. Braisted is the owner," said Captain Dumble in the deferential tone of a man who is owned along with a boat. "We're from New York."

Tevis had guessed as much, for he knew that from no other American port could so large and luxurious a pleasure craft have hailed.

"You have voyaged a long way," he ventured, addressing Braisted.

"Yes." Again that pitiful sigh, and again that look of misgiving—a look as of a swift lapse into

some past terror. Then the face became firm. "It was a long trip, but we had pleasant weather all the way."

And yet the memory of it was certainly not an agreeable one, else why the sigh and the dark look?

Captain Dumble changed the subject.

"You were pretty well soaked, Mr. Tevis, when you were rescued," he remarked.

Rescued! Tevis started a little. To be sure! Some one aboard the yacht had saved him from drowning in the creek, and here he was ungratefully anxious to get home, without having made a single inquiry about the man who had saved him.

"Pardon me, gentlemen," he said, feeling rather mean; "but I have forgotten to thank whoever it was that fished me out of the creek."

"Bless me!" said the Captain, and there were odd looks on both their faces. "Don't you know? Didn't the men tell you? I guess they forget to because they were a little ashamed. Instead of lowering a boat on the instant, as I ordered, they went running and fumbling about with life-buoys and other silly things that couldn't have been of any earthly use to you, as you were stunned by the blow and clean under water."

"Yes; but who was it—who did it?" asked Tevis hastily. "I want to thank and reward him."

"It was Miss Braisted," said the Captain simply.

"Miss Braisted?" gasped the young man, staring at him unbelievably.

“Yes, sir, my daughter,” said the stout man, full of fatherly pride. “She’s a wonderful swimmer. Of course it was a risky thing for her to do in skirts, but she didn’t have to swim very far. She just threw off her jacket and shoes and jumped right in.”

“But—but——” stammered Tevis, utterly taken aback.

“Yes,” said the Captain. “She didn’t lose a minute, but just leaped from the rail, and struck out for the place where you had gone down. She had to dive to get hold of you—you never would have risen again—but she brought you up all right and made for the dingey, where Bill, who was pretty badly scared by the outcome of the affair, sat like a stone until she commanded him to pull you in. She’s a mighty brave girl, is Miss Braisted.”

“She is that!” Tevis fervently affirmed, “and I must see her and thank her. She is a heroine, if ever there was one. But how did she do it?”

“Oh, she simply struck out and did it,” said the proud father. “She’s perfectly at home in the water.”

He rattled on about some of his daughter’s swimming exploits. On his side Tevis said little, but he felt sufficiently embarrassed, for through it all ran the thought, what manner of man did she consider him? He had not thanked her. But, after all, she must have seen his ignorance of the part she had played. How stupidly strange it was that

the men aboard the *Thetis* had taken it for granted that he was aware of the one vital circumstance which, next to being saved, most concerned him!

“Excuse me, gentlemen,” he said at last. “But I’m going home to take these masquerading things off. Then if it isn’t too late to see Miss Braisted, I’ll go aboard, with your permission, and give her my heartiest thanks. Meantime, Mr. Braisted,” he added, grasping the full, soft hand of the owner of the *Thetis*, and giving it a wrench that made him wince, “please explain my unaccountable action to your daughter. Thank her for me now, and I’ll do so in person when I am presentable.”

He left them and hastened to his room, feeling at every step of the way a cringing sense of his seeming ingratitude. His only comforting thought was that the girl must have seen that he did not know she was his rescuer. But what a situation for a stalwart young man, himself a two-mile swimmer if not a perfect amphibian! It was reversing all romance. Ah, if only the chance had been offered him to save *her* life! How gladly would he have dived to the deepest depths of the bay or of the ocean itself! But all this is not to say that he was not extremely grateful to the girl to whom he owed his life. She was a very courageous young woman, this Hazel Braisted. He repeated the name—Hazel Braisted. It was as full of poetry for him as the sweetest sonnet.

The air of his room seemed intolerable when he entered it and began to dress, and he threw up all

the windows. He had such a febrile, depressed feeling that he sank for a moment upon his bed and felt the grateful ease of it. It was hard to pull himself together to rise again. Would not tomorrow do for his errand? No; it must be tonight. But he owed this much to himself: For no other creature on earth would he have made this harsh call upon his flagging spirits—for no one but the adorable girl of the *Thetis*. In what a short time had she gained this wonderful hold upon him! And she had saved his life! Surely that was a sort of bond between them. Whatever else might happen, she could never forget him.

He rose, still a little dazed, and began to dress. It was nearly an hour later that he reached the dock, stirred up the sleepy boatman and ordered out his canoe. Looking down the creek as he was about to descend the stairs, he paused of a sudden and ran his hand across his eyes. Were his feverish state and his excitement blinding him? Where was the *Thetis*? He paddled out a little way and looked down the moonpath over the unquiet water. Was she really gone? The cool night wind fanned his face and the gug-gug-guggle of the low waves under the bow mocked the emptiness of his vision.

Yes, the yacht had run out on the ebb tide, whether to sea or only somewhere down the bay he could not tell. Like one obsessed, he clutched the paddle and made the canoe fly along in mighty bayward sweeps. Rounding a point, he saw a low

smoke down by the mole at the mouth of the creek, a good two miles away.

He turned and paddled slowly back toward the town. His lovely girl savior was gone, unthanked, without a word, without a sign of appreciation from one for whom she had risked her own life. Well, the hour would come—maybe on the morrow, if—insufferable thought!—she were not out upon the open sea by that time, and the muddy Oakland Creek and the incident of the canoe were to her but passing dreams. But no; she had saved his life—she could never forget him—of that much he felt assured.

CHAPTER III

LOVE AND ELECTRICITY

Out of the low smoke-drift of the speeding yacht a luminous idea came to him: He would hasten ashore and telephone to the Marine Exchange. There he could learn if the *Thetis* were leaving port. It took almost the last remnant of his day's strength to do this, but he did it. From the nearest telephone station he rang up the Exchange. Was the steam yacht *Thetis* of New York going to sea that night? No. To what anchorage was she moving, then? The clerk did not know—probably somewhere up the bay. No other words, but they were enough. She had not sailed.

He took a trolley car for home and arriving there at last, threw himself upon his bed. The room went round for a while, but in an hour or so he felt easier, and sagged down into a heavy sleep.

In the morning, so potent are the recuperative processes of youth and love, he was up early and again at the telephone. Nobody could tell him where the *Thetis* was. At nine o'clock he called up the Exchange once more and was rejoiced to learn that the yacht was at anchor off Sausalito. Good!

He would take the ferryboat and call over before noon. It was a strange, but, as it seemed to him, an imperative errand; and he should see Hazel again. Hazel! How much acquainted he had become with that name! It seemed that he had known it and its owner all his life.

But it was a rush day in the shop where he worked. Customers came thronging in and the telephone kept buzzing forth all sorts of superfluous orders. He was the head electrician, and that he sent the other men out on all the jobs that offered themselves that morning may readily be understood. If his employer had not chosen that time of all others to absent himself, he might have gotten away, but just at the hour when he surely counted upon his coming, he called him up by telephone to say that he had gone to San Pablo to "figure" on a contract for lighting a new hotel, and would not be back before two. While Tevis had him on the wire he asked to be let off for a couple of hours. He did not care to impart the nature of his mission, but tried to impress him with its urgency. The reply from his employer was that he would like very much to oblige him, but that this was an emergency day. He would return at two, and Tevis could be off all the afternoon if necessary.

Fuming over this intolerable situation, Tevis cursed a little under his breath, slammed the receiver upon the hook and glanced indifferently toward two persons, evidently more tiresome cus-

tomers, who were slowly entering the shop, closely scanning everything as they came in.

What was running through his head at that moment while he was full of the fret of the situation was characteristic of his temperament: Why should he ever have become a mastered man—a man who was told to come or to stay at the will of another? All his lifelong yearning to be free, to be master of his own times and seasons, came over him in an influent tide that recked not of restraint. Ah, if his invention had only proved successful! He had always hated the shop-life and its circumscribed affairs, and now it irked him more than ever.

With a touch of scorn, he looked sharply at the two incoming customers. They were a man and a woman. The man was a grizzled, sea-going looking old chap, short and rather slim, with a fuzzy beard, a mild blue eye, a small chin and a flabby under-lip. He paused and leaned against the counter, fingering some wire-coils that lay upon it.

Tevis looked at him inquiringly over the counter and, with the tail of his eye, took in the figure of the woman. So remarkable was this creature that he found himself turning to look at her, rather than at her husband, for such was his plain relation to her. The woman was tall—a full head higher than the man. She had a cold, hard, compelling eye, as black as obsidian, and yet of a wonderfully penetrating quality. Her thin, dark hair, parted in the ancient manner, was touched by the first frost, but

she seemed unaccountably old and knowing—a woman of cosmic, seeress-like wisdom. She had a sharp face, about which the wrinkles hung like the meshes of a tattered veil, a mouth that closed with a set of certitude, and a nose that suggested the Apache. There was a deep vertical line in her forehead and some smaller ones on each side of it. She looked like a “down-easter,” probably from one of the coast towns. With all her Puritan-seeming severity she had a salt-sea ruddiness about her, and one would not have been surprised to note a trace of sea-weed in her hair. The marine sentiment she suggested was heightened by a wide, wabbling gait, the walk of sailor-folk the world over. She was dressed in a dark blouse and skirt, the blouse, though loose fitting, revealing the boniness of her long waist and the sharpness of her elbows. On her head was a little sailor hat that gave her a jauntiness not very becoming to her years, yet well in keeping with her marine air and make-up.

“Well, Jim,” she rasped sharply to her hesitating husband, “I’d like to know why you don’t tell the young man what you come for.”

The little man played with the wires a moment longer, while Tevis looked over the counter expectantly and with an all-too-apparent impatience, which probably had a repellant effect upon the mild-mannered man who stood before him. At any rate when the mariner’s blinking bat-eyes glanced furtively toward the young electrician and met his

full and forbidding gaze, they turned quickly toward the wires.

"I wanted—" he began and then stopped, waving one hand as if to clutch the fugitive words out of the circumambient air.

"Merciful me!" cried the woman. "I'd like to know!" She bit off her syllables as if they were so many pieces of sea biscuit. Then she looked at Tevis with a mixed air of business and bravado. "Don't mind him," she said—"he's barnacled."

"I beg pardon?" asked Tevis interested in this odd pair in spite of himself.

"He's barnacled and a little down by the head—can't get it out all at once; but it will come in a minute. He knows what he wants."

"Course I know what I want," said the little man, with surprising alacrity, considering his first faltering. "I want to know if you've got all the stuff needed for submarine lighting—wires and water-tight globes that give a lot of light and a man to run the outfit?"

"That's right," said the woman, "a man to run the outfit—only you ought to have asked about the man first. He'd tell you what you want when you get him."

"We have everything in the way of illuminants," answered Tevis, rather carelessly and ignoring the ancient sea bird's remark, for, somehow, he did not care to deal with her, and rather resented her interpolations.

But she was not to be ignored.

“We want to see our man first,” said she, “then we can talk business. There’s no use getting waterlogged with a lot of——”

“You want an electrician of some experience, I suppose,” said Tevis testily, looking at the man. “I can get you one, no doubt, if you will tell me what kind of a plant he is to handle.”

“Well, I’d like to know!” clicked out the woman. “Ain’t it plain enough? Submarine, he said, didn’t he?” There was a hint of contempt for his suggestions. “That means under water. The lights are to go under water.”

The young man behind the counter breathed an impatient sigh.

“Yes; but how far under water, and for what kind of work?”

The man and woman looked at each other. Evidently they did not care to discuss their plans with anybody but the electrician whom they should engage.

“Oh, tell him,” said the woman, and, as the man remained silent, she said with another touch of bravado, “Wrecking. Going to raise a bark down to the islands. That’s all you need to know. Now how about the man—the electrician? Is this the right shop to get one at, and if not, where is it?”

Tevis’ heart was beating fast. The islands! Did fate send this man and woman here in the hour of his revolt, and to what purpose? His projective fancy sketched a vague picture of coral reefs and a long, low point of land from which waved a cocoa

palm with green fingers beckoning to him through the gold-haze of the tropics.

"What's the pay?" he asked, looking rather sharply at the old sea dog.

"I don't know," was the reply. "Perhaps two hundred a month, if he's an expert. Don't you think so, Emily?"

"When do you start?" Tevis cut in before the woman could reply

"About ten days," he said.

"And you go to the islands—what islands?" asked Tevis.

"Look here, mister," said the woman resentfully, her forehead quickly barred with sinister lines, "we asked you if you knew of a man for this job. We didn't say he was for us or when or how or where. We don't want to drop anchor till we get into port."

"That's all right," was the quick reply, "but how do you know I'm not your man?"

"You?" The little mariner looked at him like one relieved. "They tell me you're an expert in your line," said he. "Would you really go?"

"Yes; perhaps; if I knew a little more about the enterprise. Wait a minute. There's the 'phone."

He went to the telephone which grated into his unwilling ear the pleasant information that it would be four o'clock before his employer could return. A plague on shops! Here was an island adventure and fifty dollars a month more than his

present salary. Hurrying back to the counter, he said:

"I'll go, if it's all straight, and there's a full month's pay in advance."

"Why," said the old salt, "it's straight as a tow line, and I guess you can have the two hundred down; don't you think so, Emily?"

"Yes," said the woman. "Now let's get down to business. You know this is to be all confidential."

In the little back office, where, with much inward excitement, Tevis put question after question, it came out that the couple were Captain and Mrs. Thrale; that Captain Thrale was the owner and master of the two-hundred ton schooner *Tropic Bird* of the island trade; that the wreck he was undertaking to exploit lay in a sheltered cove off Tutuila, one of the Samoan group. Then they entered into the details of the electric outfit, though, as the captain said, he was "only figuring on it" that day; he wanted to get "some idea." Mrs. Thrale sat a little apart, satisfied for the time to leave affairs in masculine hands.

If Tevis had been impatient of the frequent dropping-in of customers earlier in the morning, he was still more impatient now, but between the selling of spools of bell wire, dry-cell batteries, and induction coils, and the taking of orders for repairs, he managed to give the captain a very good idea of what would be required for the lighting outfit. Thrale had a little piece of penciled paper

which he consulted from time to time, checking off, scratching out or adding to his list.

"How about that new kind of light, Mr. Tevis, the powerful one that comes in long tubes," he asked.

"Mercury arcs?"

"Yes; I guess that's it. How'd they go?"

"Oh, you don't want mercury arcs for that work, Captain," he suggested. "You couldn't carry them around very well under water, and they're awfully expensive."

"But we need a good strong light—one that will make deep bottom look like that carpet there, and so as we can work all night if we have to. But of course, it's got to be portable and handy and not get out of order too easy!"

"Then what you want is triple glower Nehrsts—hundred candle-power would be about right. That'll give you a light you can pick up pins by at ten fathoms on a dark night. I've seen them tried in the bay."

"And the water-tight globes and sockets?"

"No trouble about them, but I've got to do a little figuring on the wiring. Is it going to be used in rough places—over rocks and the like?"

"I guess so," mused the Captain with a far-away look in his eyes. "Oh, it will be rough enough."

"Well, you know the covering wears off under such conditions," explained the electrician. "There's an extra heavy insulated wire they make

for just that sort of work. It comes in thousand-foot coils. You ought to take along about three coils, so as to have plenty."

"Whatever you say," said the Captain. "You're to be boss of the lighting outfit, and of course you know we don't want to get caught out of material a thousand miles from nowhere."

He fingered his memorandum sheets. Just then a medical customer thrust his head into the office and asked for a cauterizing instrument in a hurry. The memorandum slips seemed to remind the Captain of something important.

"May I use your 'phone?" he asked, suddenly.

"Certainly; take the one on the desk," said Tevis, going out to wait on his customer.

He was gone but a few minutes from the back office, during which he saw as he glanced through the glass that Captain Thrale, who seemed to have no great acquaintance with the telephone, was having some difficulty in making himself understood by the person at the other end of the wire, though never once did he raise his voice. As Tevis re-entered the little room, the Captain was speaking low into the transmitter and repeating: "Yes, to-morrow night; to-morrow night; same hour; same place."

Mrs. Thrale gave a furtive glance as the young man entered and reaching over, touched her husband's arm.

"Good-bye," he said in the same low tone, and

hung up the receiver, with a jerk, turning toward Tevis with an uneasy look.

“Well, Mr. Tevis,” said he, “if you’ll come down to the schooner Thursday, any time before noon, I’ll be glad to see you again and talk things over. And, remember, you are to say nothing about this cruise of ours.”

“Absolutely nothing,” was the ready promise.

They passed out, Mrs. Thrale walking ahead in the superior manner which characterized her attitude toward the Captain.

A few minutes later Tevis glanced at the desk in the back office. On the blue blotter by the telephone lay a little slip of paper. On it was scrawled in pencil:

“Captain Dumble, Clay 1006.”

Captain Dumble, of the *Thetis*!

Tevis recalled the words he had heard Thrale repeat into the telephone: “To-morrow night; same hour; same place.”

The baffling witchery of events! All day long had he been awaiting a chance to go the *Thetis*, the vessel of enchantment, the floating home of the girl who now meant more to him than any living creature, and here, out of his own office, had gone a message to her captain.

It was strange, but not so very strange. For, after all, in the free comradery of sea-going folk, why should not the captain of the *Thetis* know the captain of the *Tropic Bird*, and make an appointment with him by wire or otherwise?

During the lunch hour, Tevis, who had been thinking a great deal about Captain Thrale's schooner, decided that he would go down and get a glimpse of her. So he cut short his mid-day meal, and, leaving a boy in the shop, took a car for the Creek. Getting off at Taylor's wharf, he walked quickly through the gate and, looking down a long lumber-pile perspective, saw the two masts of a schooner which, he judged, must be the *Tropic Bird*. At the water's edge he read her name on the rusty-looking stern.

"She's overdue at the boneyard," he commented as he gazed at the old schooner, "but most of the boats of the island trade are ancient mariners. Yes; she's an antique all right."

There was a bustle aboard and overside, men going and coming, carrying supplies in boxes and bags. At the shore end of the gangway he saw little Captain Thrale talking with a large marine-looking man with a low brow whose face he thought he had seen somewhere before. As he approached the gangway, the big sailor, who was speaking to Thrale, shifted his position a little so that his back was toward the young man.

"Yes, Captain," he heard the fellow say very deferentially, his cap in his hand, "I'm as handy a man aboard ship as ever you saw—you don't make no mistake a-hirin' me."

"Jenkins!" muttered Tevis, with a quick scowl and a flash of his blue-gray eye. Then abruptly and without uttering a word, he sprang upon the

man, his strong hands clutching him by the back of the neck with a grip of steel.

"Hello there!" gurgled Jenkins, "let go! You hurt, don't you know it?"

"Of course I know it!" was the cool reply. "How are you, Captain Thrale!"

"Why, bless me!" cried the Captain, "It's Tevis, the electrician."

"Yes, Captain; and I want to say something about this man." Jenkins wriggled and tried to turn about, but he was held as firmly as if his head were in the stocks. "You don't want him aboard your ship, and I'll tell you why."

Hastily, while Jenkins struggled in his harsh grasp, he gave the Captain an impressionistic sketch of his treatment at the man's hands.

"Dear me!" exclaimed the mild-mannered little Thrale.

"He's a lyin', Captain!" gasped Jenkins. "I don't know him at all, blame me if I do!" He writhed futilely in the implacable grasp.

"Oh, you know me all right," drawled Tevis, shaking the man so that his jaws clicked together, "and, damn you, you'll know me a lot better before you're much older. Turn round now! Excuse me, Captain."

He let go of Jenkins' throat, dodged a swinging blow aimed at him by the enraged beast, whose eyes blazed like a mad bull's, and planted his hard fist on the man's cheek.



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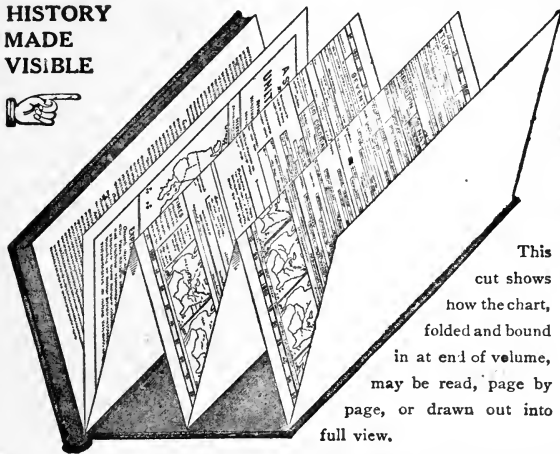
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"That's a good one," cried a sailor, dropping the bag he was carrying up the gangway.

"It was like the kick of a mule," said another man; and they all gathered about interestedly while Captain Thrale stood, with wide-opened eyes, repeating "Dear me—dear me!"

At the word "kick" Jenkins caught his cue, and after he had failed to parry three or four resounding blows that fell upon his face and neck, he sprang forward quickly, feinting with his hands, and while Tevis was lunging toward him, up came the toe of a rough boot that narrowly missed the young man's chin.

"Foul!" cried a man in the little circle.

The word was hardly uttered and Jenkins' foot was still in the air, when there was a swift doubling of the young man's arm about the cowardly fighter's ankle, a heaving haul and the great brute lay prone upon the dock.

"Get up, you thing!" cried Tevis. "If you try that again, I'll mangle you!"

"And serve him jolly well right," said a sailor, "that's what it would."

The man scrambled up, his face, in its mad rage, horrible to see. He jumped at his antagonist like a tiger, belching blasphemy. Tevis saw that he was equal to any sort of murderous tactics, as was evinced by his foul thrusts and tackles.

"Oh, well," he said at last, "if that's your style, you'll have to take it this way."

As he said the words, he sprang upon Jenkins,

caught his neck under his steel-like left arm and, holding him over so that the squirming, battling man could do little more than flail the air, he calmly proceeded to batter his face and the whole upper part of his body with his knotted right fist, while the fellow writhed and thrashed and Captain Thrale kept crying "Dear me! Dear me!"

Under this fierce rain of blows it was not long before the hulking brute bawled for mercy, finally dropping upon the wharf, his head shielded under his arm and bellowing wildly:

"Let me go—let me go! I've had enough. I'm down an' out, that's what I am. Let me go!"

"Very well," panted Tevis. "You can go, though I ought to hand you over to the police." The young man took out a handkerchief and wiped his perspiring face. "You tried to murder me, and you ought to go to jail for it; but what you just got is the kind of punishment I've been wanting to give you." He picked up his straw hat, which had fallen to the wharf and dusted it with his handkerchief.

"And it's what he deserves all right," spoke up one of the little group of sailors that had quickly gathered about. "I knew him in Boston, sir. He's a Yankee cut-throat if ever there was one."

"Well, I'd like to know!" piped a high-pitched female voice from the schooner's deck.

Looking up, Tevis saw the sharp, determined-looking face of Mrs. Thrale.

"I don't think, young man, you ought to 'a-made

all this fuss right here at our gangway," she complained. "It ain't Christian to fight that way. You ought to a-let the law take its course."

"I'm sorry to have disturbed you, madam," said Tevis as he watched Jenkins crawl away among the lumber piles; "but I couldn't let him go without seeing him punished right here. I'm sailing on the schooner, you know, and the law is a little slow sometimes. I couldn't wait to prosecute him."

"Well, maybe you're right," said Mrs. Thrale. "Coming aboard?"

"Thank you. I haven't time now. I've wasted all I could spare on Mr. Jenkins. I must get back to the shop. I'll be down this evening, if you like."

"All right," said the Captain's wife. "We'll be expecting you. 'Come to supper, can't you, and we'll talk things over.'"

"Yes," said the Captain, "we'll talk things over."

"Very well. Good morning!" And, lifting his hat, Tevis strode off to catch a car he saw coming over the drawbridge a little way down the creek.

"He's a mighty husky chap," said one of the sailors, glancing over to where the collapsed Jenkins sat against a shingle-pile, wiping the blood from his face. In his hands he held a brick that he had evidently intended to heave at Tevis, but about which proceeding he had changed his mind.

"That's what he is," said another seaman admiringly. "Did yeh see how he held the big lob-

ster? He got him in shankery that time. Didn't give him a chance to git in one good punch, did he?"

"Here, you men, git to work there," commanded Captain Thrale. "Roll in them barrels!"

"Mercy sakes! I should say so!" cried his wife. "All this time lost over a disgraceful fight! But," she added, looking down the long lumber lane where Tevis strode swiftly toward his trolley car, "He's got a lot of grit—that's what he has—to tackle a big, rough sailor like that. He's the kind we're looking for. And I'm awful glad we didn't ship the other man if he's such a low-down rascal as they say he is. Captain, them crates there ought to come aboard next. There's no hurry about the barrels."

CHAPTER IV

A TALK WITH MISS BRAISTED

It was not until late in the afternoon, when the sun hung low over the brown hills of Sausalito, that Tevis stepped from the ferryboat, from the deck of which he had already noted the white hull of the *Thetis* lying in the mouth of Richardson's Bay. He hired a boat and rowed out to the yacht, passing up the gangway without challenge. The first officer, who was on deck, looked inquiringly at him.

"Is Miss Braisted aboard?" asked the visitor.

"Yes; in the saloon I think, sir. I'll show you the way. You look all right after your trouble of yesterday," he observed. "Guess you weren't much hurt, after all?"

"Not very much," was the reply.

"That's the door," he said, pointing to an entrance way. He went back and Tevis hesitatingly entered the saloon, his knock being answered by a neatly dressed maid.

In a pretty pink-and-white afternoon gown, which made her look less the sailor than when he had seen her before, Hazel Braisted sat in an easy chair in the richly ornate room. Above and about

her were innumerable carved figures of mermaids swimming around the mahogany wainscot, with corbels of more mermaids supporting a cornice, above which was a damask frieze. So much carving made rather a heavy interior effect, and against the rich dark walls the trim, neat figure and finely rounded face of Hazel Braisted stood out like a picture of St. Cecilia. She laid aside her book as he entered. The maid who had flitted in at his entrance, flitted out again, and he was alone with the girl of the *Thetis*.

"Oh, this is Mr. Tevis," she said, welcoming him with a pretty outstretched hand and a definite, informal smile. My father told me your name and I remembered it easily, as we have friends who are Tevises, in New York."

"Yes," said the young man, feeling somehow as if he had known her a long time, which was natural as she had been so much in his thoughts of late; "and you are Miss Braisted. I have come to thank you for saving my life. You must have thought me an ingrate not to have done so before, but I knew nothing about it until I went ashore and met Mr. Braisted and the Captain."

"I knew you didn't," she smiled graciously, and her brown eyes lighted up with a friendly look. "And I want you to pardon me for laughing at you; but in those old clothes you did look so—so——"

"Ridiculous," he finished.

"I didn't say that," she said, smiling again.

"How have you been? Were you much hurt? You certainly recovered quickly. We wanted to keep you until morning, but you ran away."

"Yes," he replied, "and you ran away, too."

She raised her dark brows a little, and there was an inquiring look in her eyes.

"I mean," he explained, "that when I went back to thank you last night the yacht was gone."

"Oh, we didn't like to stay in that smelly old creek, among the melons and things, so we came over here, where it's so beautiful. See how the window frames that island, and the little one with the hole through it. What do you call them?"

"Alcatraz Island and Arch Rock," said Tevis. "Do you like the sea?"

"I love it," she said fervently. "I was never on such a long cruise as this. We have sailed thousands and thousands of miles. I have had such good company, too. My friend, Mrs. Poindexter—she is a great reader and knows everything—has been with me on the whole voyage.

"This is a wonderful boat," he remarked, glancing about at the mermaids.

"Yes," she said, "it seems like home to me; everything is so convenient."

She leaned over and touched a push button. The dark interior instantly flashed forth in the light of a score of soft little electric lamps. This led to a talk on the electric arrangements aboard the yacht. He explained his interest in the matter and it seemed to please her.

“An electrical engineer?” she said. “How interesting!” She leaned her hand on her chin and looked intently at him. It was a becoming though unconventional pose. “I should like to be something of that kind if I were a man—something wonderfully advanced and scientific.”

He said nothing of his commonplace duties in the shop and of the dreary round of bell-hanging jobs. He was about to speak of the south-sea enterprise, when he remembered the promise of secrecy he had made to the Thrales. But there were other electrical topics. It seemed strange to him that the daughter of a great millionaire, doubtless full of social ambition, and with a baronet dangling about her—he assumed that he was dangling—should care for such subjects as long-distance power transmission and arc-lighting, but her eyes glowed when he told her of some of the big things that had been done in his line on the coast. She also seemed greatly interested in what he told her of university life in California. On the other hand he became intent upon her picture of Wellesley, which, from his far side of the world, was something remote. But, of course, they came back to the yacht.

“She’s such a trim, steady boat,” she remarked, “and fast, too. We expect to make Honolulu from this port in seven days.”

“When shall you sail,” he asked, trying to background his interest in the matter by an indifferent tone.

"To-morrow, at noon."

"And you're not coming back?" His voice wavered a little here.

Miss Braisted fingered some flowers on the table at her side as she said:

"No; we're for Japan, China, India and home by Suez."

He saved his sighs for a later hour, and looked out of the saloon window across the hazy bay to Alcatraz and Telegraph Hill. Of course this dream would end as it had begun—in nothing.

"I expect to make a voyage myself before long," he said thoughtfully after a while, "and to the islands, too. You spoke of Honolulu. Perhaps we shall meet there. But, no, I sail in a slow boat—a schooner. And I am to return to California, while you are going around the world." There was obvious depression in his blue, eloquent eyes.

"Well, it may be that I shall see you down at the islands." Then she added, reflectively, "But you say yours is a sailing vessel. There isn't so much likelihood of it then, as our visits will be very short at the ports we put into. Mrs. Poin-dexter says we're just playing tag with the places."

"I had hoped," was his venturesome remark, "that you might be making your home here on the coast. Then I might have a chance some day to repay you for saving my life."

"By saving me in turn?" she said with twinkling eyes. "That would hardly be a fair exchange.

I am so useless, while you men of electricity are helping the world so much. Then you mightn't have so easy a time of it as I had. You might be pulled along and trampled by a runaway horse, or something."

To his serious nature it seemed strange that this angelic woman could make light of such matters. It came to him that he had not fully impressed her with his sense of gratitude. He was trying to think what he might add to his first insufficient words, while she rippled on about the yacht and the cruise. But before he could say anything more a door opened as doors open on a stage, and—enter the baronet! He was dressed in smart London clothes of a pronouncedly checked pattern and with his trim brown beard, broad face and cold gray eyes, he looked the part. He was followed by Mr. Braisted, who had politely waved him in ahead, a deference to which the Englishman seemed quite accustomed. Of course there were greetings, after their kind—a pleasant one from Miss Braisted's father, and an indefinably disapproving one from Miss Braisted's lordly admirer, now formally introduced to Tevis as Sir Charles Walden.

"Ah," said the Englishman, putting up his monocle and looking Tevis over as if he had been a horse or a hunting dog, "the boatman—the man who had the little mill with Jenkins and whom you fished out of the creek yesterday. Most extraor-

dinary performance! As I have said before, you American girls are equal to anything."

"She was equal to that occasion all right," said her father proudly.

Tevis wondered if there were an understanding between the young woman and the baronet. He was tremendously concerned lest it should be a typical case of British fortune-hunting to which the girl's father had given willing ear. Still, even as he looked at it from his inexperienced point of view, a baronet could be no great catch from a millionaire's standpoint, if, indeed, it were the fact that Braisted was eager for a title for his daughter. To be sure the woman who married Sir Charles would be Lady Walden, and that, to many American ears, would sound large.

Tevis glanced at the girl while she poured the tea which had just been brought in by a remarkably clean looking, white-clothed Japanese boy. She fascinated him. He could hardly keep his eyes off the fine, classic profile detached against the dark wainscot. He said little until Walden, lifting his tea-cup, which looked absurdly small in his large red hand, aimed some fierce shafts at American institutions, declaring among other things that the freedom of which Americans were always boasting was not equal to the freedom of British-born people and that as for government the country really didn't have any. So, before he was aware of it, Tevis was drawn into one of those interminable and profitless arguments with the Briton as to the

respective merits of their two countries. But Miss Braisted, with the neat tact of the acute American girl, presently led the conversation out of the dangerous rapids.

Tervis did not stay long after that, but long enough to see the face of the money king relapse once or twice from its social pleasantry into the wan look of misgiving he had noted the night before. That he was a man with "something on his mind" seemed clear to him; but that his daughter knew what that something was and shared the dread of it with him, was unlikely, for she was blithe enough.

Just as he was preparing to leave the yacht, Mrs. Poindexter, who had been making a visit ashore, came down the companion. When Tervis was presented to the stout, cheery, cultured-looking little woman whom he was at once willing to concede to be "good company," as the girl had called her, he saw by a certain brightness in her lively eyes and a certain smile on her face that she knew who he was and that he had been sufficiently discussed aboard the yacht. They exchanged a few polite sentences, while Walden and Braisted, standing a little apart, talked of the sights they had seen ashore.

"Well," said Tervis, as he rose to go, "I fear I have extended this call unconscionably. Good-bye, Miss Braisted!"

"Good-bye," she said as he took her hand as a

devotee might have taken a sacred relic; "I hope we'll meet down at the islands."

"There's hardly a chance of that," he said, making a dismal failure of his attempt to return the smile—"not while I sail in a slow schooner and you go in a fast boat like this. But in any event," he added in a low tone that the others did not hear, "so long as I live, I shall remember you and how you saved my life."

"Good-bye, Mr. Tevis," said Braisted, coming over and giving his hand a hearty grip. "Very glad to have met you."

Walden merely bowed. He was satisfied to be rid of a visitor, who, though but a craftsman, had had the assurance to engage him in argument.

Mrs. Poindexter, unlike the baronet, not only saw Tevis' extended hand, but gave it a friendly clasp, and made one of her bright little speeches.

Tevis gazed once more into the dark eyes of the winsome girl. It was such a wistful, yearning, and yet baffled look, that she did not fail to catch its meaning. Her eyes fell and her smile faded. He saw the change in her face, but instantly reflected that it was but a touch of her finely responsive spirit. He could mean nothing to her, after all. It had been but as a meeting of two in a crowd, the glimpsing of a face, a meeting of eyes and a swift but infinite divergence.

He said "good-bye" to her again, moved quickly up the companion to the deck, and rowed away in

the dusk with a quick, hard, vindictive stroke that was a protest against inflexible destiny.

Looking back at the yacht after rowing a little while, he saw through the gathering twilight a girlish figure on the after-deck and his heart told him it was Hazel. Perhaps she had taken enough interest in him to watch him row ashore, though this hardly seemed likely. But—was it a trick of his fond fancy or was that fluttering white something in her hand a handkerchief, and was she waving him farewell? Well, he would wave in return on the rare chance that it might be. He wigwagged his handkerchief toward her, but was not sure that she replied to his farewell signal. So he pulled slowly ashore in a strange flux of moods, landed at the little wharf and went aboard the waiting ferryboat. As he stood on the upper deck and saw the *Thetis* blur out in the darkness and distance, it seemed that something was catching at his heart and dragging it down into the depths of the bay. For she would sail away on the morrow.

Just as he was leaving the ferry on the Oakland side he caught a glimpse of Captain Dumble in the crowd. Was he going to keep his appointment with Captain Thrale? This was "to-morrow night," and the hour and place were doubtless near. This trim yacht captain, as smart in his blue uniform and cap as any Sousa—what business or social relations could he have with the fusty little master of the *Tropic Bird*?

CHAPTER V

SOME ODD SHIPMATES

THE tide-rip battled above the bar outside the Golden Gate, where the *Tropic Bird*, heeling under the gusty trades, bravely fought her way out to sea. Before night the headlands would sink into the blue Pacific and the Coast Range would be lost to her. Tevis, standing on the after-deck, his legs well braced against the unaccustomed heave and roll of the ship, was thinking of Hazel Braisted and the *Thetis*. Her sailing over this same stretch of sea only a few days before had left a wake of romance across these waters. She must now be breathing the softer air of the South, for she should be half-way to Honolulu. Would he meet her down there? It was unlikely, for the yacht must be gaining eight knots an hour upon the schooner, and would leave port long before she reached it, even if the old craft put in there, which was uncertain, for the Thrales had revealed nothing to him as to their sailing route.

Sadly he reflected that there was now only this in common between him and Hazel Braisted—they were sailing the same ocean. There was not much in that thought, but there was something. At least he was not left ashore while she sailed away.

Down by the Farallones the trades took the schooner in their teeth. The cordage began to hum, the dingy sails of the old *Tropic Bird* puffed out and her nose dipped under a souse of spray. There was aboard the little vessel all the suppressed excitement of the long voyager's first plunge into the open ocean. But soon she sailed into a racing drift of fog that blotted out everything but the near water and dampened the elation of the start. A mournful siren wailed from the Farallones, and continued its unhappy call to them until they were well out to sea, pitching on a vast world of unquiet water amid cold sweeps of misty scud.

"A pretty decent start," Tevis heard Mrs. Thrale say to the Captain as they stood in the lee of the forward house. "The tide serves well, but goodness me! I hate a gray blanket like this."

How perfectly she looked the part of the woman of the sea Tevis now had a chance to note. In a long, heavy brown ulster that came down to her feet, and with a little blue cap pulled well over her head, she faced the raw, pelting fog with a rigid, resolute air, her deep-wrinkled, half-shut eyes piercing the murk ahead, and the prick of the wind, bringing the color to her hard cheeks, as to a girl's.

He heard her ask sharply why the fog bell was not being sounded, and a flaw of wind blew the Captain's mild reply to his ears:

"It ain't thick enough yet."

“Yes; it is, too, and there’s more of it coming. May be dirt in this, for all we know.”

So the bell began to ring and kept up its dismal note far into the night.

Tevis had been looking over the schooner and the crew, and getting acquainted with his assistant, a likely lad, named Jim Reynolds, engaged at the last moment of the hurried start on the voyage. Of the *Tropic Bird* there was not much to be said. She was small, with cramped, but wonderfully clean, cabins, the walls of which were covered with the peeling paint of many years. In fact everything about her suggested age, even to the rigging and the patches on the old weather-darkened sails. But her cleanliness was marvellous and was due to Mrs. Thrale’s careful marine housewifery. Every bit of brasswork or glass aboard ship was polished and cleaned until it shone.

The crew had been a surprise to Tevis. A little craft like the *Tropic Bird* might easily have been handled by four or five men, but she must have had a score, not counting eight taken along especially for the diving and wrecking work. Whenever an order was given, there would be more men tumbling up from the forecastle or along deck than were needed on a square-rigger. And as for boats there were half-a-dozen, including a twenty-four foot gasoline launch.

At supper he sat at the Captain’s table, where Mrs. Thrale poured the tea as if she were sitting at her New England board. In fact, the whole

scheme of affairs in the cabin suggested the rigid, dirt-defying housekeeping of New England, in which her presence was dominant and pervasive. Captain Thrale said grace, and she bowed her head very low and reverently and responded with a clear "Amen."

After dinner and while talking with Thrale in the after cabin, which was a sort of sanctuary to cleanliness and spruce arrangement, Tevis kept studying Mrs. Thrale, who sat in a rocking-chair, with a clean "tidy" at her back, stroking a white cat that lay in her lap. At her feet was a braided rug. She said nothing to them during the talk, but he could see by the uncomfortable way in which the Captain glanced at her that what he said was always with reference to her approval. Tevis could not help pitying the meek little man. He wondered why he could not have left his wife ashore.

Going on deck, Tevis went aft and stood near the wheelman where he could see the whirling patent log marking off the miles. About ten o'clock the fog lifted and a friendly little troop of stars shone out in the dark sky overhead. So he turned in, with a feeling of cheer, but lay awake a long time, thinking of that other ship in the wake of which he was sailing, and how her propeller was pushing the miles aside to so much better purpose than the dingy wings of the ancient *Tropic Bird*. But his heart was fleet and it chased and caught the *Thetis* and boarded her in the night.

In the morning, finding nothing else to do and

not caring to read, he told the Captain he would like to take a look at the electrical outfit and see if everything were in good order. Thrale was on deck talking with the mate. A dozen of the superfluous sailors were smoking their pipes forward, and the mate was pointing to them, or was it to something out at sea—that long stratum of dun smoke on the southern horizon?

“Why,” said the Captain, looking up rather queerly, as Tevis thought, “you don’t have to do anything with—— There’s no use—you can’t get at the stuff anyway. It’s all down in the hold and safe enough.”

“Very well,” replied the young man, “but I thought I should like to look it over and see how the boxes and crates had been stowed. You know those globes are breakable. I should have seen them put away myself; but had to go hunting around at the last minute to hire my assistant.”

“Oh, they’re stowed away all right,” said the Captain. “I saw to it myself.”

The mate was looking through his glass at the smoke-drift.

“It’s *her*, all right,” he said at last. “It’s *her* stack and masts.”

Tevis wondered what the vessel might be. Of course it was not the *Thetis*. She should be over a thousand miles away by this time. He sauntered aimlessly about the deck, and from time to time there came to him the queer look which Captain Thrale’s face had worn when he had spoken of the

electric outfit. Being with the boatswain a little later, he ventured to question him.

“Electric fixtures?” he laughed. “We ain’t got no electric fixtures. This ain’t no liner.”

He explained that they were part of the cargo—they were along with the diving apparatus.

“Cargo?” laughed the man again. “Well, if you call eighty tons of Oakland rock, cargo, all right. That’s all the cargo we got, except them steamer-hands there forward.” He laughed again, this time contemptuously. Then of a sudden he bethought himself. “Who are you? I mean what is your berth to be? Quartermaster?”

“No,” replied Tevis simply. “I’m the electrician. What do you mean by steamer hands?”

The man’s face took on a rigidity equal to that of Mrs. Thrale’s.

“Oh, you’re the electrician! Why didn’t you say so?” he exclaimed. “Of course, I ain’t had no time to git acquainted, so I didn’t know. But—it’s all right. You’ll find the things all there when you want ’em.” He walked aft, leaving the young man to puzzle over his strange contradictions.

Tevis went over and hovered around the Captain and the mate, they had been joined by Mrs. Thrale, who came aft with her white cat in her arms. They stood near the rail, looking off at the smudge of smoke in the south, which seemed to be floating a little nearer.

“That’s her all right,” said Mrs. Thrale, with a note of excitement in her voice. “Must be, for

there's Point Sur to eastward. I was afraid we wouldn't pick her up before afternoon, but the wind has held good." Turning, she saw the electrician and said: "Fine day, Mr. Tevis," and began to talk about the gulls that were following the ship, leading him aft to see them.

"What vessel is that out there—a coast steamer?" he asked.

She looked toward the gulls as she replied: "I guess so. Ain't it strange how they carry their legs? See that one with his foot hanging down—must have been wounded or something. Poor old Port!" she said to the cat. "Does he want to get down." The cat sprang to the deck, arched his back and rubbed against Tevis' trouser leg.

They talked for a while about the birds, while he thought of the steamer. Then Mrs. Thrale went below. He walked over to the wheel, and by the binnacle box he saw a pair of marine glasses which he picked up furtively, clapped to his eyes, and pointed toward the distant vessel. He screwed the glasses down a bit to get the focus, and suddenly in the little circle, there danced before his eyes the familiar lines of the *Thetis*! Yes; there, he saw again, though with faint definition, the beautiful floating home of Hazel Braisted—far in the offing, to be sure, but yet within his vision. What had happened to delay her? Had her sailing date been postponed or had she been to visit some up-coast port and was now on her way south? These questions bothered Tevis.

All day long they kept the yacht in view, sometimes away out on the hoop of the horizon, then again so near that they could see the moving dots of people aboard. Tevis watched her closely. Once a wee white object fixed itself in his mind as Hazel, and his breath quickened with delight. It was not often that he could obtain the use of the glass, or he might have made her out beyond peradventure, though this his heart did, not once, but many times. How slowly the yacht must be moving to admit the schooner to come so near. Was she disabled? On one or two long tacks they almost lost her, but at night, with a fair wind, they kept her lights in sight, and from his little round peephole of a window they swung up to him out of the sea over and over again, while he lay in his berth, and gazed across the dark water.

In the morning the yacht's white hull glittered in the bright sunlight not two miles away, as she steamed slowly south. It seemed likely to Tevis that something had happened to her machinery, and yet at times she made fair speed, being at noon merely another smoke-bank to them.

Thinking of the excitement of Mrs. Thrale and the officers when the *Thetis* had first been picked up, he could come to no other conclusion than that there was a relation of some sort between the two vessels, particularly as the sailing date of the yacht must have been changed to that of the schooner; and the thought was a welcome one. But clearly that relation, whatever it might be, was to

be kept in the dark, for not only had Mrs. Thrale and the Captain discouraged his question, but now they seemed to pay little attention to the distant steamer. Here was a puzzle, or possibly no puzzle at all; for what could the cheap little old hulk in which they sailed have to do with the splendid *Thetis*? What could her master have to do with Thrale?

It occurred to him that he had within the fortnight asked himself that last question before, and then the remembrance of the Dumble telephone incident flashed out of his cerebral background. Clearly there *was* some relation between the two oddly assorted craft. What could it be? What was the meaning of this strange chase of the *Thetis* and of her deliberate cruising? If it should ultimate in their overhauling or joining the yacht in some port yet to be sighted it would, indeed, be a happy circumstance, for then he should see Hazel again. But in the meantime all he could do would be to await events.

Tevis soon saw that the crew all hated Mrs. Thrale and that they held Thrale in contempt for letting her order the men about, as she did at times.

Although she had not as yet practiced her sharp tongue upon him, Tevis had quickly learned to keep clear of her. Often he would have liked to ply her with questions regarding the strange stern chase of the *Thetis*, but he could not brave the bar sinister and those quickly bristling elbows.

Her most forceful fulmination was when the cabin boy tied a piece of paper to her cat's feet and was contorting with laughter as he watched the animal cavort awkwardly over the deck while the men looked on, highly entertained, roaring with merriment. On approaching and seeing the spectacle, Mrs. Thrale clawed wildly through the circle of men and, grasping the offending lad by the arm, she hurled him against the forward house, gasping with rage.

"Tom Brannagan!" she screeched, her face at white heat, and her black eyes snapping. "You little imp! To persecute a poor cat that way! Mercy me! Well, I'd like to know! And you men! You ought to be keelhauled, every one of you!" She picked up the struggling cat and tore the strings and papers from its feet. "Poor old Port! He's worth a hundred times as much as any man of you! Oh, I know a lot of city-front, saloon loafers when I see 'em. You can't fool me. I'd like to know!"

And she strode off with her cat under her arm, her black skirts switching wildly.

The men looked at each other.

"You don't all feel cheap as sand ballast, do you?" snickered the boatswain coming up and witnessing their degradation. "Had to take it right out o' the medicine chest, didn't you?"

"Oh, Ay gif a tam for her!" said a burly Swede. "I don'd bin shippin' mit no vooman captains no more no how."

But Mrs. Thrale had her gentle moments. She was a creature of quick sympathy. Once when a sailor had been standing for hours out on the bowsprit splicing a footrope and had returned to the forecastle drenched and chilled, she went forward with a bottle and glass in her hand.

"Here's some elderberry wine," she said pouring out a glassful. "Drink it—it's powerful warming. And if you sailors never drank anything stronger you might have a dollar or two left by the end of the year."

And it did prove warming, not only to the blood, but to the heart of the man who held Mrs. Thrale in high respect thereafter and would hear no cynical word concerning her.

Day after day, over the brightly flashing brine, upon which the summer sun played resplendently; day after day, while the schooner ploughed down the long gleaming swells and up again to their liquid heights, they kept the yacht in sight, and in the night saw her twinkling lights play over the sea, flashing on the wave-tips and running along the water in whimsical vagrancy. What deepened Tevis' now well-fixed impression of some sort of understanding between the masters of the two vessels was the fact that, once or twice at night, when the *Thetis*' Captain must have feared she was losing the schooner, her searchlight gleamed suddenly out of the dark. Once when it lighted up the somber old sails with ~~mild~~ refulgence, Tevis

caught sight of the lone figure of Mrs. Thrale detached against the house. She was standing astern her glass to her eyes, staring seaward, through the night, and as he looked at her he could not dismiss from his mind the idea that she was a sinister sea hawk, peering at her prey.

He wanted to go to her and plump out a question as to the meaning of this odd chase. Were they to follow the yacht all the way to the islands? And had she anything to do with their own mission of salvage? He thought many times about the wrecking apparatus and the electrical outfit and what the boatswain had let out in his unguarded moment. He speculated, too, upon his futile attempts to elicit something from the crew about the wrecking things they were supposed to have shipped, but evidently had not shipped. Never had he talked with such a lot of lunkheads. They knew nothing about the stuff stowed in the hold. It might have been full of tan bark or waste paper for all they knew—or would tell. But as he now approached Mrs. Thrale in the darkness, she turned upon him sharply and said that the first mate was looking for him for a game of euchre.

“Not that I approve of cards,” she added, with one of her Puritan touches. “They’re a device of the devil. But if you don’t play on Sundays or for money——” and she turned again abruptly, walked over to the binnacle and looked at the compass with a fixed stare. He went below to seek the mate, a very decent chap named Flamel, with

whom he had become acquainted before they left port. Flamel was a florid-faced, blond-mustached, well set up man of thirty, who talked as though he had found this globe a very pleasant planet. He was sitting under a lamp at the side of the table when Tevis entered the cabin.

"Aren't we heading nearer south than the regular course for the islands?" he asked the mate. "I thought I saw some shore lights just now," which was the truth, for the lights had glowed dully in the west and the schooner was assuredly not far from the Californian coast.

"Must have been some ship," said Flamel.

"No," he returned positively, to see what the man would say, "the lights of the *Thetis* were due south. She was playing her searchlight on us."

"You must be pretty smart to know the names of all the steamers we run in sight of," he said laughingly and evasively, while he fingered the cards. "Shall I leave in the joker?"

"Speaking of the *Thetis*," began Tevis as he cut the cards.

"I wasn't speaking of the *Thetis*." He dealt out the hands swiftly. "Diamonds are trumps."

"I was going to say she left port just a little ahead of us, and——"

"Yes, the *Thetis* is a dandy boat. Clyde-built, all steel except her trimmings. I saw her in the bay. She can go over twenty knots they say. Ah-ha! The first trick is mine."

Tevin could not get Flamel to talk about the yacht any further. He did not put his mind to the game, lost carelessly and turned in early.

Next morning he rose betimes. There was the *Thetis* within a mile, standing clean white above the dark blue of the sea. But little smoke was coming from her funnel; she was moving slower than ever. Over to the west the brown hills of the coast stood out plainly. He asked one of the idling hands what port the vessel was near.

"Looks like San Diego," said the man unhesitatingly. "Yes, there's Coronado over there."

A little later he chanced in at the Captain's cabin. Thrall was not there, but, spread out upon his table, was a chart on which the course was marked. The red line ended at the mouth of San Diego Bay. What about the islands? Perhaps that course would be laid later. But the *Thetis*? She was evidently not for the islands either. It was baffling. He was impatient to know the meaning of it all.

They made no headway that morning nor did the steamer. She idled up and down or lay-to off the harbor mouth. In the afternoon she steamed into port, while the *Tropic Bird* hovered a little farther off shore. Indeed, Tevin feared at one time that she was putting out to sea on her long voyage to the islands and that he had seen the last of the yacht. He had devoutly hoped they might be going into port, too, for then he might see Hazel again.

But after a long tack to the west, the schooner veered north and then stood over toward the shore.

The sun blazed redly down into the western sea. It was a glorious evening with a light wind and a long glassy swell. The schooner's sails slatted idly as she lazed along. There was an air of expectancy aboard, eager, but quiet. Mrs. Thrale was on deck, with the Captain, and the two studied the landward sweep of sea as a hunter studies a hill for deer.

It came on toward dusk. There were the lights and the smoke of a steamer coming out of the harbor in the growing breeze. She sailed directly toward the *Tropic Bird*, the sea getting rougher as she neared and the wind coming squally and uncertain. Tevis saw Mrs. Thrale give an impatient signal to her husband.

"Ready about!" he called.

The schooner's head was laid due west. The mainsail was close-reefed, and the foresail shortened a bit. Looking astern, Tevis saw the *Thetis* steaming toward them in the gathering darkness. She was now well out of the harbor and not more than half a mile away. The sky was somewhat overcast, so that the stars shone out only now and again and there were shoreward streaks of mist through which the street lights of San Diego shot forth as they were turned on for the night.

He was looking fondly toward the oncoming *Thetis*, when, of a sudden, he saw a great cloud of

smoke puffing out from amidships, a little forward of her funnel. At the same time he saw a bustle aboard the yacht; there was a running to and fro and the quickly clanging strokes of a bell.

CHAPTER VI

WHAT HAPPENED IN THE FOG

THE *Thetis* was afire! Of all this smoke and confusion there could be no other meaning. And Hazel—she was in peril! The thought sent Tevis excitedly up and down the deck. Of a sudden she had become more dear and necessary to him than ever. What could he do to help her.

There was not much commotion aboard the *Tropic Bird*. She was ordered about again and lay-to in the freshening wind. Two of her boats were lowered—the gig and the dingey—and were bobbing astern, but not manned. It was evident that the Captain was not greatly concerned about the lives of those aboard the yacht. But as for Tevis he was fairly beside himself. A fever of anxiety consumed him as he looked toward the great cloud of smoke that now enveloped the *Thetis* and then stared agrily at the silent Thrale, who stood upon the after-deck, with his wife, in irritating deliberation. Once the wildly impatient young man came near and caught the look in Mrs. Thrale's eyes. If the glare of the sea hawk had blazed from them before, it burned with treble intensity now. Of pity, of concern for the threat-

ened lives aboard the burning boat, there was not a gleam; but of avid fierceness, there was a great, rampant force. A little of this force seemed to impart itself to the Captain, but only a little.

“Well, they’ll be moving out of their floating palace now, I guess,” remarked the woman with a sneer. “Yes; there goes the boats—pretty well loaded, too—pulling ashore. He must have ordered ’em all off. Going to make quite a fire,” she remarked, hardly turning her eyes. “Looks like it was down in the hold. May be it’s their trunks burning now. Suppose they carry forty of ’em on a cruise like that. It’s a great thing to be rich.”

“Captain,” cried Tevis, with devouring impatience, “aren’t you going to do something for the poor souls aboard that yacht? Aren’t you going to send——”

“We’re standing by to see what we can do for ’em,” explained the Captain, rather hazily. “I’ve got a couple of boats lowered. Maybe I’ll be going over before long.”

“Will you let me take one of the boats,” he urged excitedly. “I want to do something myself if I can.”

“Let the boats alone,” snorted Mrs. Thrale. “We’ll take care of the boats.”

“But you might——”

“Oh, save your breath for the doldrums,” she rasped forth. “Look there, Captain! She’s blazing up, ain’t she?”

A red glare rose amid the smoke. The eager

young man waited no longer. Running astern he pulled in the painter of the dingey, dropped lightly into the boat, and rowed away like mad.

"Hey there! Stop! Bring her back!" yelled the voice of the mate, who had returned to his post. But Tevis paid no heed and was soon a good distance off in the fog. He could see only a little way ahead, over the waves, but before long he heard cries from the yacht or from her boats, and he was guided by these sounds. He could no longer see any gleam from the fire, which seemed strange. The twilight was settling down heavily with the thick mist. The voices came less distinctly and then were lost altogether. He hardly knew where he was going, but of a sudden he heard the schooner's bell clang out, and as it rang quickly, again and again, he kept the sounds well astern and pulled forward.

Evidently he had missed his reckoning, for he did not seem to be nearing the *Thetis*. Where was the red glare of her fire? Had it died down or had the fog and the smoke obscured it? He rowed fiercely about for a half-hour in search of the yacht, and was almost despairing, when out of the fog he heard voices. He pulled hard in the direction from which the sounds came. As they were wafted a little nearer by the wind he detected something familiar in them. He yelled again and again and a big voice boomed back in reply. A few more strokes and, over the bow, he saw a small boat with a man standing up in her and

others sitting with motionless oars, as if listening to his call.

"I say, my man!" roared the voice. "Which way ashore?"

It was Sir Charles Walden. And, sitting all huddled up in the stern, was Miss Hazel Braisted, with a white face under her little cap. There were four or five men in the boat beside the baronet, but Tevis did not distinguish Hazel's father among them. Of course, she did not recognize him, and he doubted if she knew his voice when he shouted:

"I don't know the way ashore, but I'll take you to the schooner. That's her bell you hear over there."

"Well, anywhere out of this cursed fog!" bawled Walden. "Lead the way, my man. We want to get out of this as soon as God will let us."

Turning his boat about, Tevis headed toward the schooner. Her bell now sounded rather faintly. Suddenly on both sides of him he heard more voices, and then the low deep note of a whistle droned out of the mist from not far away. Was the signal from the *Thetis*? She had blown no distress whistles before. How was it that she was beginning to sound them now? Besides the fire must have gained upon her by this time and all hands must have left her. But no flame lit the bank out of which the whistle issued. It was all very strange, as of a tragedy going on behind a lowered curtain. Now he was nearing the bell, for the fog-muffled note rose a little clearer.

“We’ll soon be there!” he called back encouragingly to Walden’s boat. “We’ll soon reach the schooner.”

Then he listened for the next brassy note. It did not come. He pulled away, paused and strained his eyes forward through the mist. Nothing but the wash of the waves about his boat, then the long-drawn wheeze of the whistle.

“Where’s your schooner?” called Sir Charles, as both boats slackened, losing headway.

“I’m looking for her,” answered Tevis. “She’s over there somewhere.”

“Hello, there!” cried a new voice out of the fog, coming from the left.

“Hello!” replied Tevis. “Is that the *Tropic Bird*?”

“No—one of her boats—going off to the yacht. Are you from the schooner?”

“Yes.”

“Better pull along to the yacht then; all hands goin’ aboard. That’s her whistle.”

The boat showed shadowily through the murk.

“But the yacht’s afire,” he yelled back. “We want to go to the schooner.”

“Fire’s all out!” came the reply out of the fog. “Follow us if you’re going aboard.” The boat loomed a little nearer. She was piled dangerously high with luggage and there were at least eight men in her.

“The fire is out! Oh, good! good! The fire is

out!’ It was Hazel’s glad voice ringing from the baronet’s boat. “Is she much damaged?”

For a moment there was a strange silence. Then the answering voice blew out of the fog.

“No—not to speak of. Didn’t amount to much.”

The girl called out other eager inquiries, but there was no reply. It may have been because the gusts whisked her cries away; but Tevis heard them plainly.

His boat ran up a long dark wave, with the baronet’s just astern. As they topped the watery hill, a great flame leaped from the sea not far away. It was volcano-like in its suddenness and it shot through the mist, turning it to a shimmer of red and gold.

“There’s the fire again!” he heard Hazel’s despairing cry. “The yacht is gone!”

Then the whistle moaned dolefully, dead ahead.

“Come on!” shouted the men in the schooner’s boat. “Follow along.”

Bewildered and well-nigh dazed, Tevis rowed in their wake and Sir Charles’ boat followed him. The wind scurried down more briskly and the sea kept rising.

Presently dull lights glowed uncertainly ahead, and out of the fog stretched the low, white length of a steamer, her hull, masts and funnel showing ghostlike in the mist-softened glare, which arose from the other vessel.

“Why, there’s the *Thetis* now!” cried Hazel, standing up in the boat and waving her hand to-

ward the steamer. "And she's safe and sound. But what's that other fire?"

Yes; here surely was the yacht, apparently as trim and whole as ever. And the other blaze that had flared out of this bedeviled sea—it could come from nothing else than the schooner! The flames shot higher and illumined the night and illumined, too, some of the blankness of Tevis' mental vision. He saw boats coming from the blazing *Tropic Bird*, full of men and luggage, and other boats, also loaded high, were being hoisted at the *Thetis*' side. And it flashed upon him that a part, at least, of the plot was about to be unfolded. He was soon to understand the mysterious relation between Captain Dumble and the Thrales—soon to know the meaning of the strange chase down the coast, of the lying-to outside the harbor, of the fire which did not consume the *Thetis* and of that other and greater conflagration which was now licking up the timbers, spars and sails of the poor old *Tropic Bird*.

CHAPTER VII

HAZEL CONFRONTS THE CAPTAIN

SIR CHARLES' boat was hoisted first and Tevis had to await his turn below the davits in the gathering storm, so that his craft was badly knocked about, and once came near side-wiping the yacht. When he reached the deck he did not see Hazel or Walden.

Looking about the dimly lighted yacht—the electrics were not burning—it was clear to Tevis that little damage, if any, had resulted from the fire. Above decks there was certainly none. It seemed likely that the flames had been confined to the hold. Aboard the boat were all of the schooner's old crew, with Flamel, the mate, and others whom Tevis knew. He stepped up to Flamel who was standing forward, giving orders to the boatswain.

"Who is in command?" he asked.

"The old man," was the reply.

"Captain Thrall? Where is he?"

"Up there on the bridge."

"Where's Captain Dumble?"

"Gone ashore with the owner and the yacht's crew. They got out in a hell of a hurry. It looked for a time as though the ship was gone."

“Who put out the fire?”

“We did. It wasn’t much of a blaze. I wonder they didn’t get it out themselves.”

“Captain Dumble was here, wasn’t he?” asked Tevis rather sharply, for he was filling out the plot in his mind as he went along, and with Dumble off the yacht when Thrale came aboard, it did not work out.

“No, Captain Dumble wasn’t here, nor any of his crew,” Flamel said simply.

“How did the schooner get afire?” pursued Tevis.

“I don’t know. I wasn’t aboard.” Again the averted gaze.

While they were talking, the yacht’s screw gave a tentative grind and a quiver ran over her. Tevis went to the rail. The *Tropic Bird* was already burning down close to the water. In half an hour the waves, which were now running high, would be closing over her.

The Captain—where was he? Tevis looked eagerly about. The yacht was gathering speed and her nose, dipped in the choppy waves, was driving seaward. He hastened forward and clambered to the bridge. Through the window of the wheelhouse he saw Captain Thrale, laying off the course, while Mrs. Thrale leaned over the chart table on which stood old Port, the white cat. He opened the door and the wind blew him in.

“Why, it’s Mr. Tevis!” exclaimed Mrs. Thrale.

“Yes—Tevis,” echoed the Captain. “Well, how

do you like the new ship?" he said, trying to carry off a light air, though his loose under lip was working nervously.

"Captain Thrale," began the young man in his hardest tone, "I understand that you are in command of the yacht."

"Yes, sir."

"How did you get command of her?"

"Yes; you see she was afire, deserted—a derelict—and I came aboard, with some of my men and put out the fire and took charge of her."

"And then burned your own boat," flung out Tevis in a flash of inspired conjecture, "so that those ashore would think it was the *Thetis* and you could steal her. I will tell you what I think of that—it's arson and piracy. You ought to be jailed for it, and shall be, if I live to enter charges against you. I demand to be put ashore."

The Captain smiled a sickly smile and said with a breaking bravado: "That's all right, Mr. Tevis. But you've signed for this cruise, and you've got to go along. We need you to handle the electric lights aboard ship and for the diving later."

"I signed for the *Tropic Bird*," was the determined reply, "not for the *Thetis*." Then he thought of Hazel. "There is a young woman aboard, the daughter of the owner, and an English gentleman, a guest of his. I found them in a boat that had put off from the yacht while she was afire, and I helped to get them aboard again. I demand

that they be put ashore, and that I be put ashore with them."

"Oh, you *do*, do you?" sniffed Mrs. Thrale, with a cynical smile, while she stroked her cat. "I'd like to know!"

"I was addressing the Captain," came Tevis' indifferent reply to the sea hawk.

"Sorry," said the Captain apologetically, "but I can't let you land now. You see we're headed out on a long cruise. As for the young lady and the Englishman we'll take good care of them."

"I think you'd better, sir,"—Tevis brought each word out broadly—"that is, if you take them along on your cruise, which I don't intend you shall do. You doubtless have very good reasons for keeping us aboard—you don't want anybody telling about this affair."

"Gracious sakes alive!" broke out Mrs. Thrale. "I'd like to know! Now, sir, don't you think you and that young lady you're so interested in and the Lord, whatever his name is, are just as well off on board this yacht as anywhere? Ain't Captain Thrale just as good a master as Captain Dumble, and ain't we got a good crew, and ain't you on a better lay than ever?"

"May I be permitted to ask," remarked the confused Tevis with no little asperity, "what is my lay?"

Mrs. Thrale glanced at the quartermaster at the wheel.

"Let's go down into the Captain's cabin," she suggested, gathering Port up into her arms.

The three left the wheelhouse, bracing themselves along the deck. Tevis gazed about for the *Tropic Bird* and he saw the Captain and his wife looking for her, too.

"There she is!" cried Mrs. Thrale, with a sort of sinister delight.

"Where?" asked the Captain.

"Hull down, to shoreward."

There was a faint glow far astern.

"Not much left of her by this time," said the Captain with a sigh, which raised him a bit in Tevis' respect.

"Less the better," said Mrs. Thrale, dryly. "Did you hear them tugs tooting in the fog back there? They're out after her."

"Guess they won't find much," remarked the Captain.

Even as he spoke, the glow paled to utter darkness. The *Tropic Bird* had vanished.

"She's gone clean," said the Captain; "I knew she'd sink before they could get near her. They won't pick up as much as a gasket." He sighed again very deeply this time, and looked sadly across the sea to where the schooner in which he had sailed on so many voyages had gone down.

"Oh, don't bother about that old tub," said Mrs. Thrale, "with her rotten planks and masts just ready to drop. She ought to have gone to the bone-yard years ago."

No sooner had they seated themselves in the Captain's room and the cat had been snuggled down into Mrs. Thrale's lap than there was a knock at the door and in came Sir Charles Walden and Hazel Braisted. The girl's round face was white with excitement and her black hair was in beautiful disarray. Walden looked sullen, and then stared hard in his slow way at Thrale and his wife. Tevis was sitting in a corner behind the Captain's desk and neither Sir Charles nor Hazel saw him at first.

"Is this Captain Thrale?" demanded Walden in his big voice.

"Yes, I'm the Captain," replied Thrale in his little voice.

"Then, sir," cried Hazel, stepping forward in lovely dismay, her lustrous brown eyes full of searching inquiry, "perhaps you can tell me about my father. Is he aboard the yacht? I can't find him anywhere. Did he go ashore?"

As she came nearer to Tevis, whose heart was full of her presence, he looked out of the angle behind the Captain's desk and their eyes met, while a little show of warm color came into the girl's white face.

"Oh, Mr. Tevis!" she exclaimed, with radiant satisfaction in meeting him in that moment of her distress. "I'm so glad you're here. You can tell me what I want to know, I'm sure,—about my father and Mrs. Poindexter." Her dark eyes gazed appealingly into his.

"I'd be very glad to do so, if I could," began Tevis, "but——"

"He don't know anything about your father or your lady friend," broke in Mrs. Thrale, pausing in her petting of Port and looking at the girl with a certain air of hostility, while the Captain fidgeted at the desk, got up and sat down again. "He's just come aboard and hasn't seen him."

"Then, Captain," cried the girl eagerly, hardly looking at the woman whom she evidently regarded as a rude creature, "maybe you can tell me about him. Is he aboard the yacht or did he go ashore?"

Thrale fidgeted a little in his chair and looked at her uncertainly.

"Can't you speak, man?" demanded Sir Charles, looking hard at him out of his cold gray eyes. "Why don't you answer the lady?"

The Captain faced the picture of beautiful, confused young womanhood, and cleared his throat apologetically. Tevis offered her his seat, but she did not accept it and stood looking with soft inquiry at Thrale.

"My dear young lady," the Captain stammered, "your father—I suppose you are Miss Braisted—your father isn't aboard. He must have gone ashore in one of the boats."

"I'm so afraid something has happened to him," said the girl, with quivering lips. "Do you know which boat he went in? He made me go in the first one, and he waited aboard to see if they couldn't put out the fire. I wouldn't let the men

row me ashore at first, but made them stay near the yacht waiting for him. After awhile he called to me that the yacht must surely go, for they couldn't get the fire out, as the pumps wouldn't work; and he ordered our boatment to row in. We started, but were caught in the fog. The men quarrelled about which way to go, while we drifted about. Then a boat came and another and they guided us back to the yacht. I was surprised to find the fire had been extinguished. I heard that it was you and your schooner crew that came aboard and fought the flames after our men had given up the boat as lost. You must have worked very hard, Captain, to put it out," she added, looking straight at Thrale out of her big, dark eyes.

The Captain stared at the flat top of the desk.

"Yes, they did," assisted Mrs. Thrale, stroking her cat for inspiration. "It was an awful job. The heat in that hold was something horrible. One man was nearly suffocated."

"Terrible! Poor fellow! I hope he'll soon recover!" said the girl with a sweet and ready sympathy that Tevis felt was native to her. "But my father—don't you know anything about him? I am so—so anxious to know if he is safe."

"Oh, don't worry," said Mrs. Thrale, in a strangely tender tone that startled Tevis, for it was the first he had ever heard her use. "He's all right. He went ashore with the rest, you can depend on that. There was nobody aboard when we came."

"Nobody?" demanded Walden, looking at her incredulously. "Had everyone left the yacht?"

"Yes, sir," replied Mrs. Thrale shortly, "they had. We didn't find a soul aboard."

The words seemed to comfort the girl. She pressed a dainty little handkerchief to her eyes, and said:

"Oh, no doubt he's safe—he must be safe; but you know I couldn't help worrying. The fog was so thick and—but the yacht is moving, and moving fast. Are we going back to San Diego?"

Neither the Captain nor Mrs. Thrale was prepared for this quickly turned question. Thrale stared at the desk-top again and the sea hawk pressed her beak tight in perplexity.

"No; we're not going to San Diego!" cried Tevis of a sudden, for he thought it time to say something. "We're putting out to sea. These people have seized the ship, and are trying to make off with her."

Hazel turned, and there was large wonder in her deep eyes as she gazed at him.

"Is that true—how do you know that, Mr. Tevis?" she exclaimed.

"Yes," sneered Sir Charles, "what are *you* doing here in company with these pirates?"

"I am here, as you see," explained the young man, warmed a little by the insinuation, "but I am no part of the plot. I shipped aboard the *Tropic Bird* as an electrician to go on a cruise to raise a wreck."

“And instead of raising a wreck,” was Walden’s fling, “you’re raising the wind with these precious pirates by stealing a valuable yacht.”

Miss Braisted lifted her hand as if in deprecation of these words.

“I believe Mr. Tevis has been acting in good faith,” said she, “though I am surprised to find him here.”

She said this with a show of friendliness that was grateful to Tevis.

“I was just demanding of the Captain,” Tevis went on, “that the yacht be headed back to port, and restored to her rightful owner.”

“Yes; to my father. Oh, how I want to see him—to know that he landed safely.” She turned to the Captain again, indignation beginning to blaze in her eyes. “Captain Thrale,” she said determinedly, in her clear round tones, “you have saved the *Thetis*, and my father will reward you—reward you handsomely—but you have no right——”

“Merciful me! “I’d like to know!” nasaled Mrs. Thrale, the bar sinister showing in her forehead, “Now, young lady, you don’t understand——”

“Pardon me, Madame,” said Hazel, with a queenly wave of her hand. “I was speaking to Captain Thrale. I want him to explain his action.”

“Yes; we came aboard,” said Thrale slowly, his fingers fidgiting with the edge of the table. “We

came aboard from the schooner *Tropic Bird*. We found the yacht afire. All her crew and officers had gone off in the boats. We put out the fire. Then, as there was nobody to take charge of her, we just put our whole crew aboard—you see we had a large crew—and——”

“And then you played pirate and ran her out to sea,” was Hazel’s firm and frigid accusation.

“After setting fire to his own schooner,” declared Tevis, “so that those ashore might be misled into the belief that the *Thetis* really burned, as Captain Dumble has doubtless reported by this time.”

“Oh, *that’s* how the other vessel came to be afire, was it?” cried Hazel, remembering the blaze she had seen at sea.

“Yes,” he replied, “that’s it.” He felt that he could have told her more, but refrained, for something whispered to him that what he suspected of the conspiracy had better be kept back for the present.

“But, Captain, even though you saved the *Thetis*,” said Hazel, “she doesn’t belong to you. Of course you must have thought so, or you wouldn’t have burned your own vessel. The yacht belongs——”

“Land sakes!” broke in Mrs. Thrale, her eyes burning like points of crude fire and her forehead bar showing severely, “I guess you don’t know much about marine matters, young lady. People who sail in yachts generally don’t. Goodness me!

Can't you see she had been abandoned by her master and crew—she was a derelict, and anybody happening along, had a right to her, if they could save her."

"Is that true, Sir Charles?" asked the girl, paling a little. "You understand law."

"Well, it may be true about some derelicts," said Walden, "but in this case the Captain, as it seems to me, merely went ashore for assistance—for tugs to put out the fire. And, in any event, I should say the vessel must be taken to the nearest port. You are merely the salvor," he said, looking at the Captain. "I don't remember what the law is, but don't you have to put into the closest port and post notices and that sort of thing?"

The Captain made an apologetic mumble in his throat, which brought Mrs. Thrale up, standing to her guns like a veteran.

"No, we *don't!*" she cried conclusively. "We can go to any port we like. Supposing we wanted to go to Valparaiso—we could do it, and they couldn't lift a finger. For all you know, we're going there, sir, and you are going along, and this young lady and Mr. Tevis. So you might as well make yourselves at home, as you've been doing here; and that's all settled."

"Yes—settled!" said the Captain, with a show of firmness.

"Supper will be served at eight bells in the owner's dining-room," said the new mistress of the *Thetis*, rising and letting the cat spring to the

floor, "and you can eat there if you ain't too high-toned to sit at table with us. If you are," she added, with mocking softness, "I'll send your meals to your rooms."

There were further expostulations, and demands, and, on Miss Braisted's part, even entreaties; but the sea hawk did not ruffle a feather, and the Captain, so ably backed up, was also rigid enough, though they all had secret hopes of prevailing upon him a little later, when he could be importuned alone and not in the presence of the woman who so plainly dominated him. But there were the other officers and the crew. Tevis reflected that it would be hard to win them over, for they were doubtless all in the plot and eager for their share of the loot.

"You can keep your same rooms," said Mrs. Thrale when Hazel and Sir Charles turned dejectedly from the Captain's cabin. "Your Jap—the little fellow who was in the boat you came aboard in—told me which ones they were. If you don't mind, the Captain and I will keep the two large ones just forward of yours, Miss Braisted."

The girl sighed, gave Tevis a little nod, and went out with Sir Charles. Tevis followed the retreating figures aft and to the door of the saloon, with the intention of saying something to Hazel. He wanted to explain his position more fully to the young woman in whose eyes he wished to be thoroughly justified. But on going below, she said

"Good-night," and went straight to her room, which was just off the saloon.

"Beastly situation," grumbled Sir Charles, tolerating Tevis for the moment, as there was no one else to talk with. "Perfectly rotten, don't you think?" He sank into a big easy chair.

"Tell me," asked Tevis, "how did you come to sail down here? You were going to Honolulu. This is away off your course. How did it happen?"

"Blest if I know," declared Walden, hopelessly. "I thought we were going down to the islands direct, but here we are off this rotten old place. Yacht catches afire, that little old Yankee pirate seizes us and now we're off for the Lord knows where. It's a beastly country, that's what it is."

"I don't know what the country has to do with it," remarked Tevis coolly; "but I wish you would tell me one thing: Where was Captain Dumble when the fire broke out on the yacht?"

"Haven't the slightest idea in the world, my man," replied Walden. "I was down in Phelps' room with a couple of other men playing that beastly American game of poker. It's a rotten game—I never won a shilling at it yet."

It became evident to Tevis that he would learn nothing from Walden that would help him to clear up the mystery. So, with another expectant glance at the door through which Miss Braisted had disappeared, he started up the companion. Stepping on deck at the last stroke of seven bells, he went immediately to Thrane's cabin. He wanted to find

out what had become of the luggage he had left on the burned schooner. The Captain in reply to his questions said he supposed his things were all right. The steward would know. He asked if Tevis would not get the generators to working and turn on the electric lights. The young man hesitated reluctantly, but when he thought of Hazel and how she must miss the cheer of the bright electrics he was ready for the work.

He hunted up the steward, who informed him that all his belongings were safe aboard. They were in the between-decks room which Mrs. Thrale had assigned to him. The steward showed him the room. It was a very neat little affair, paneled in oak; and prettily decorated; but the former occupant had left on the walls some dazzling pictures of women, a few not altogether proper, and his taste seemed otherwise lavish, for there was no end of tinsel stuff and gimcrackery stuck up around the wainscot. As soon as the steward had gone, Tevis sat down for a moment to think. He had been in such a head-muddling whirl for the past few hours that he wanted a chance to clear up matters. That fire aboard the yacht! How had the flames been extinguished? What had been the damage? He was determined to learn these things, if possible, though it seemed likely that where there was so much mystery, he would encounter difficulties in his quest.

He opened a valise and took out a pair of old overalls, a blouse and a cap. He would get the

generators to work and then he would begin to investigate. In his costume and capacity of electrician he would have a good opportunity to do this.

Summoning Jim Reynolds, the young man who was to act as his assistant, he went with him, down the iron ladder that led into the engine room. They soon had the generators burring away, and the current switched on. Now for the investigation. Tevis slipped a little electric lantern into the front of his blouse, and sauntered leisurely into the fire-room among the men. At that moment there seemed to be a scramble to get up steam, for the stokers were heaving in coal at a lively rate. Nobody noticed the electrician. He made his way forward past the coal bunkers and through a bulk-head door and came to a low, narrow passage, leading into the hold. Here in the passage he smelled lingering fumes that came to his nostrils as the odor of burnt rags. A little farther along his feet encountered a soft, soggy mass that showed under the glow of his lantern as old pieces of wet sailcloth and mattresses, partly burned. He kicked some of the stuff over and revealed odds and ends of unconsumed tow and greasy waste.

Here, then, was the *Thetis'* fire, at close range—a clearly concocted affair—a fire that was nothing more than a smudge, though a powerful one and well calculated to create terror in the breasts of those aboard who were not in the plot. It was a perfectly safe incendiarism, for not only was the

floor of iron, but the side walls, too. Tevis kicked over some more of the half-consumed stuff. Underneath it and a little way up the sides he found some large sheets of asbestos. The whole mass of smudge stuff might have burned quite merrily without danger to the yacht. With that bulkhead door leading to the boiler room closed, and the hatches ajar and pouring forth a dense volume of smoke, the fire panic could have been spread to the engine-rooms, from the deck, and no one below need be let into the secret. Two of the yacht's men, entering from the forward hatch, could have arranged the whole job, and one man with a few buckets of water could speedily have extinguished the smudge in the passage.

It was now clear that an honest, though unwitting attempt to extinguish the fire could have been made by the men of the yacht, who might have sent streams of water from the fire hose into the smoking hold, without once wetting the smoldering stuff in the little nook of a passage, and then have desisted without suspicion when Captain Dumble had ordered them away, telling them their efforts were useless.

But the red glare? How was that to be accounted for? It came from the deck and could have been seen by the crew, very few of whom were probably taken into the conspiracy. Yes, but when did the glare break forth? Probably not until everybody but the Captain and his confederates had left the vessel. A safe and not too pyrotech-

nic blaze could easily have been made by the burning of a mixture of red-and-yellow fire, from the iron top of a hatch.

Shutting the bulkhead door behind him, Tevis stepped over the mass of smudge stuff in the passage and peered from an open doorway into the hold, the floor of which was a few steps down from the alleyway. Flashing his lantern into the dark little room, he looked searchingly about. He was now well down in the bottom of the yacht, where the angle-iron ribs and braces of her lower waist showed out roughly and yet he could see no water, only a little suggestion of dampness here and there. About him loomed huge packing-cases and crates, and without looking very closely at these, he made sure in a moment that among them were the very ones that had been shipped from his old shop in Oakland. They contained the wires and electric fixtures, and those others doubtless held the diving dresses, hose and pumps. He passed his hand over his forehead in dazed perplexity and then it came to him suddenly and with the certainty of perfect conviction, that the boatswain was right in his first unguarded statement that the electric outfit and diving apparatus had never been aboard the *Tropic Bird*. It was clear now that they had all been stowed in the yacht's hold before leaving port. One thing seemed plain enough—their presence here was a part of the very peculiar plan, whatever it was, concocted by Captain Thrale and Captain Dumble. It was, he felt sure, a plan ar-

ranged for a consideration and was doubtless unknown to the owner of the yacht.

Just as he was leaving the hold-alley, with his lantern tucked into his blouse, Tevis saw the boatswain and another man coming from the engine-room. He dodged in among the coal bunkers and waited until they had passed him. The boatswain remained by the bulkhead door, while the other man gathered up the fragments of the sail-cloth, mattresses, and other material and took them into the hold. Then the boatswain followed, and soon Tevis heard him call out, "Hoist away!"

The tell-tale stuff was being removed through the hatchway to be thrown overboard in the night.

CHAPTER VIII

MRS. THRALE IN A NEW SETTING

LEAVING the lower deck, Tevis hastened to his room, got out some clean things and made himself ready for dinner, hoping all the while that Hazel Braisted would be there, yet somehow doubting it. He was burning to see her, for there were many things he wanted to discuss with her, and his heart assured him that he would not be unwelcome to her presence, nor, indeed, to her confidence. He looked into the saloon on his way to join the Thrales at dinner, but she was not there, nor did he see the baronet.

Although he felt himself a pressed man aboard the steamer and was still sore under the indignity of it, Tevis had cooled down to a somewhat politic state, for he felt that, for the time, there was more to be gained by quiet concession than by kicks.

He was in this new mood when, in the richly decorated dining-room, he met Mrs. Thrale, in her new-found state. There, too, was the Captain, looking a little uncomfortable in all the luxury of the place, but neither Miss Braisted nor Sir Charles was present. Mrs. Thrale was closely examining the china and cut glass wedged into the

racks of a pretty sideboard, and Thrale was trying to follow her explanation of them, which was somewhat misleading. Despite the discomfort of his new position, the Captain managed a look of quiet mastery when he gazed about under the soft electric lights. He even braved forth in a little pleasantry.

“Don’t this beat schooner life by a few knots?” he asked, waving his hand toward the highly decorated panels, representing hunting scenes and shepherdesses with their flocks.

“All handpainted, too,” said Mrs. Thrale. “And the china and cut glass—it’s grand!”

“Did they leave the silver?” asked Thrale abruptly.

“A little, not much; but there’s plenty plated ware. And you ought to see the linen—napkins as big as pillow slips, and the table’s solid mahogany. Yes,” she said, turning to Tevis, “there’s everything you can think of, all over the ship. Two pianos, one that goes by machinery. No end of books and magazines in the library. And you just ought to see the laundry and the big kitchen range, and the copper pans, and the ice plant and the cold-storage room, and the bath-rooms, with their solid marble tubs and white tiles, and the owner’s and guests’ rooms, all in bird’s-eye maple. Mine and Miss Braisted’s are lined with silk, and there’s full-length mirrors. And the beds, they’re all the finest curled hair—that is, on this deck; not for the hands, of course.

“What are you going to do with Miss Braisted?” asked Tevis, getting back to what was to him the main point of interest in the situation. “Aren’t you going to let her go ashore? You could put in at San Pedro, if you don’t want to go back to San Diego.”

“Oh, we’ll think about that later,” said Mrs. Thrale. “You and I and the Captain are going to have a little supper here and talk things over. I’ve ordered a nice steak and fried potatoes and there’s some lovely celery and lettuce-and-tomato salad. The Captain loves salad.”

It was astonishing how, in such a short time, the former mistress of the sordid little schooner had acquainted herself with everything aboard the magnificent yacht, down to the minutest details. If she had taken pride in her fleckless marine housekeeping before, she fairly glowed with it now.

They sat down at the big round table, with its clean, white cover and sparkling glass and cutlery, Mrs. Thrale confidently, the Captain uncomfortably, and Tevis just a bit morose.

“Miss Braisted and the lord ain’t coming to dinner to-night,” said Mrs. Thrale. “But we’ll have ’em to meals regular after this, I guess, and you, too, Mr. Tevis. Where is that buzzer?” She was feeling about on the rug with her foot. “There, I guess I struck it.”

A door swung open from the pantry and in came the little Japanese servitor, silent and stiff in his white jacket.

“Yo—— What’s your name?” puzzled Mrs. Thrale.

“Yokio, ma’am,” said the Japanese.

“Oh, it’s too outlandish and I’ll always be forgetting it,” said she impatiently. “I think I’ll call you Charley. Charley, bring the steak right in and the potatoes and things.”

The Jap, who was evidently pleased with this new cognomen, breathed through his teeth in the hissing inspiration which is the sign of great respect on the part of the menials of his race toward their masters, and was otherwise as deferential as he could possibly have been to the yacht’s millionaire owner. Soon the meal was served. The Captain tucked the corner of his big napkin into his collar and attacked the steak with the carving knife, as if he were harpooning a shark.

“For the land sake, Captain Thrale!” cried his wife, “put down that knife and fork.”

“What’s the trouble?” asked her husband in his deprecating way.

“Why, ain’t you going to ask the blessing? I guess we ain’t got too high-toned for that, have we? I’d like to know!”

“I thought——” began the Captain; and Tevis pursued his mental logic: Aboard a stolen ship, grace before meat seemed out of place. But he bent his head, and so did Mrs. Thrale and Tevis—she very low and reverently—and mumbled the words. Then he harpooned his steak again and was soon eating voraciously and swallowing cup-

ful after cupful of the tea which Mrs. Thrale poured after she had turned the saucers over, looked carefully at their bottoms and held them up to the light.

When the Captain and Tevis leaned back in their chairs puffing the perfectos which the Jap handed around in a big fat box, it seemed a strange situation, though a very comfortable one. Tevis had never before enjoyed the ease and luxury of such voyaging.

"Captain, we're going to own a boat like this ourselves some day," said Mrs. Thrale, looking about at the shepherdesses, "and sail all over the hull world. There's nothing like a private steamer, and we're going to have one."

"Maybe," he replied through a wreath of blue tobacco smoke. "Maybe, Emily."

"Why," said Tevis, just a bit satirically, "you own this one, don't you? You run her as if you did."

"Oh, we're running her all right," was the woman's dry little return, "though if she was *my* yacht I wouldn't let men smoke up these beautiful pictures. Still, as long as the other folks did and you've got such good cigars, I won't say anything. But about what you just remarked, Mr. Tevis—now you don't suppose we're big enough fools to throw ashes to windward, or to think we can keep her forever, do you? All we want of her is just for this cruise."

"You mean, for the wrecking work?" he asked

innocently but looking straight at the sea hawk to note the effect of his question.

"Now, Mr. Tevis," said she, resting her lean elbow on the table and looking at him narrowly with her button-bright eyes, "does it stand to reason we'd need this fine, expensive yacht, burning I don't know how many tons of coal a day, just to go down to the islands and raise a little old schooner, worth, maybe, three thousand dollars? No, we've got a bigger thing than that." She paused a moment and looked toward her husband, who smiled an uncertain little smile. "You've been making some objections, Mr. Tevis, wanting to be put ashore, and so on. My country! Do you know what you'd be throwing away if you went ashore and we got another electrician to go on with this thing? Why, you'd throw away a fortune."

"That's what you would," affirmed the Captain.

"Granted," said the young man, with more than a shade of severity. "You doubtless have some profitable enterprise in view, but I ask you if this thing looks right? To begin with, you seize a valuable yacht and then you——"

"Hold on," rasped Mrs. Thrale, the bar sinister deepening in her brow, and her black eyes hard as bullets. "I've heard enough of that kind of talk. Lawsy me! She ain't stole. Didn't you see us pick her up as a derelict? I'd like to know!"

"But you knew she was not fairly and regularly derelict," insisted Tevis, his blue eyes flashing. "You were in a scheme—some would call it a con-

piracy—with Captain Dumble, by which you were to gain possession of her on pretence of a fire. You are not dealing fairly with the owner of the yacht—you are running off with his property, when you ought to be taking it back to port.”

“Oh, you don’t understand,” repeated Thrale. “We’re on an even keel here. We don’t list port or starboard.”

“Then why don’t you enlighten me?” asked Tevis irritably. “I don’t believe you can make your share in the affair look any whiter than it does.”

“Well,” said the Captain, “supposing that a very rich man—a big Wall-street millynaire—had dragged anchor in his business and drifted toward white water near an ugly reef. Supposing he finds his affairs in such bad shape that all he can do is to cut his cable and make a run for it, which he does and sails to a port a good many thousand miles to westward. Then supposing he gets news by wire that his business is gone all to smash and he ain’t got a dollar in the world except what’s tied up in a steam yacht on which he’s squandered a pot of money, but which he can’t sell right out of the dock because she’s so many thousand miles away from any place where they buy steam yachts. He thinks about her insurance, don’t he—how he can get hold of it?”

“But Mr. Braisted isn’t that kind of a man,” protested Tevis. “I’ve seen him, and I could tell that plainly enough.” He felt somehow that he

must uphold Hazel's father, though as a matter of fact, he knew very little about him, merely taking it for granted that a man with so charming a daughter must needs be a worthy one.

"Oh, *that* kind of a man!" retorted Mrs. Thrale contemptuously. "Didn't he try to get Captain Dumble to burn her? The Captain—now there's an honorable man—he let on that he would, but the more he thought about it and how he loved the ship and all, the more he made up his mind he wouldn't."

"So Dumble pretended to burn her, after making a bargain with you!" said Tevis, whose mind had been swiftly at work. "How much did you agree to pay the grafter?"

"That don't cut any figure," was Thrale's evasion.

"Well, let's say a few thousand. How much is the insurance?"

"Two hundred and fifty thousand," replied Thrale.

"As much as that?" Tevis lifted his eyebrows.

"That wasn't too high," insisted the Captain. "She cost him over half a million."

Tevis reflected a moment. Here, indeed, was a strange explanation of the plot. He could accept Dumble's share in it, but hardly that which the Thrales had imputed to Braisted.

"How was he to collect the insurance money?" he asked. "The creditors would count the policies as an asset. They would——"

"Policies all in his daughter's name," explained the Captain. "He transferred the yacht to her six months ago. His wife was dead. He had only his daughter."

"Then this yacht belongs to Miss Braisted. You have seized *her* property," declared Tevis.

"I'd like to know!" snapped Mrs. Thrale. "Tell him how it stands, Captain."

"Why, you know how them things are," said the Captain, waving his hand, as if here were a most common occurrence. "Transferring a ship that way is like taking a dollar out of your right-hand pocket and putting it into your left. It was a makeshift—a neat little business trick."

"And, of course, perfectly justifiable," sneered Tevis; "and your part of the affair, too."

"So far as *we* are concerned, it was," Mrs. Thrale gazed at him superiorly out of her hard black eyes. "All we did was to pick her up after she had been abandoned, put out the fire that was burning her——"

"A smudge of wet sail-cloth and old mattresses, with a little red fire to make a good stage effect," was Tevis' sharp and sudden thrust—an unexpected rejoinder that brought queer looks from both the Captain and his wife.

"But she was a derelict, just the same," insisted the woman, defiantly, "and we went aboard and manned her."

"With a crew brought down for the occasion," said Tevis sternly. "I don't see——"

“*Derelect!*” the sea hawk persisted, bowing her unrelenting beak. “And the kind of derelect that don’t count for anything except to the people who save her. The owner didn’t want her—he gave up all claims to her, didn’t he, when he set her afire and abandoned her? We’ve done him a good turn, though he hasn’t heard about it—we have saved him from what-do-you-call-it?”

“Arson,” supplied the Captain.

“Yes, arson; and he’ll no doubt be thankful in time when he repents of the deed.”

“And you needn’t think the underwriters are going to make any kick,” said the Captain. “They’ll be too darned glad to find out, after a few months, that the yacht’s all right. I suppose he’s declared his loss already—he wouldn’t lose any time. The underwriters may pay out the money on her, but, they’ll get it all back when she returns to port. She’s good for it.”

“But they’ll make trouble for you when you land,” was Tevis’ final objection.

“Oh, we’ll just run in to some little California harbor, anchor, skip ashore, and disappear after we’ve sent a note by a messenger reporting her,” replied Thrale confidently, “That will be about the way of it, and nobody harmed that I can see.”

Then they disclosed their plans, or at least a part of them. These were to run the *Thetis* down to Mazatlan, coal her and cruise up the Gulf of California, along the narrow strip of coast which divides that long inland sea from the Pacific.

There they would make use of the diving and electrical appliances, but to what purpose they did not at first divulge. Not being acquainted with those waters Tevis could think of nothing but wrecking as the object of the cruise. But again and again he was assured that no wrecking enterprise was planned or had been planned. They frankly acknowledged that the scheme as set before him at the first had been a ruse. They would have told him of their real intentions at the outset, they owned, but he was a landsman, would not have understood and might have balked.

"Well," said Tevis, "I hardly know what to believe now, after all your falsehoods, but I shall insist upon being told what there is afoot, and I'll make my own deductions. It will not change in the least my present attitude toward you, nor my desire, I should say my demand, to be put ashore."

"Oh, yes; it will," said Mrs. Thrale, smiling confidently. "It's too big a thing for a young man like you to throw over his shoulder."

"What *is* it?" he demanded.

"It's a fortune—that's what it is," she declared, conclusively—"a fortune for us all." He had never seen gripping avarice shine from the eyes of anyone as they shone from hers, when she said these words. "It's a fortune. It means houses and lots and a yacht like this, and all kinds of things."

"Perhaps," he said, his curiosity ranging high, though he was not tempted by her talk; "but will

you kindly tell me what it is?" He looked at the Captain, and out of his mouth there shot, as it seemed involuntarily, the word: "Pearls!"

"Pearls?"

"Yes, thousands of 'em—the biggest, richest pearls in the world."

"That's right," affirmed Mrs. Thrale. "They're down there, and we mean to have 'em. And the shell, too—that's worth something."

"The shell?" repeated Tevis.

"Yes—mother-of-pearl." The sea hawk's eyes gloated over the prospect.

"The banks," said Thrale, "have been worked all up and down the coast ever since the days of the old mission *padres*. The Mexican government grants concessions to four or five companies and they try to keep everybody else out, though they don't half work their claims. The biggest boat any of 'em has got ain't sixty feet long, and we're a hundred and twenty-two over all. But they've got nothing to do with us. We'll go to work on a scale that'll make them slow-going dagoes and Chinamen open their eyes, if they see us."

"But they *won't* see us," cried Mrs. Thrale, with the air of one already in possession of a great prize.

"That's what the submarine electric lights are for," owned the Captain, looking at the young man half-apologetically. "That's my idea. I've been waiting for years for a chance to do something down there, but I never had the right kind

of a ship. You'll have nothing to complain of, Mr. Tevis. We're going to treat you handsomely. Your share will be a twentieth."

"But it's poaching," declared the young man. "From what you say, it looks to me as though Mexico had granted the same kind of rights to these pearl companies that the United States has granted to the Alaskan sealers. You can't go pearl-fishing in the Gulf of California any more than you can go seal-hunting in the Bering Sea."

"Oh, but it's different, entirely different," persisted Mrs. Thrale. "A seal is something that goes ashore and climbs upon the rocks. The pearl oysters are down at the bottom of the Gulf, and you have to fish them up. Nobody can give anybody else a right to anything that's down in the sea and stays there. If they can, why then I want to stop sailing God's free ocean and go back to farming on the Penobscot."

She went on expounding her marine "rights" at some length. It was all a part of the peculiar philosophy, mixed with the strange Puritanism, which completely justified to her conscience the seizing of the yacht and putting forth to sea in her, rather than permitting her to go through a legal process for whatever salvage the courts might have allowed. Sufficient unto themselves were the moral laws of Mrs. Thrale. Her uxorious husband, always the weaker vessel, believed in them and in her, and she strengthened that belief

on occasion, with her sharp elbows, her avid eyes and her "I'd like to know."

"Yes, Mr. Tevis," said the Captain. "We'll make Mazatlan in about two days and La Paz in about two more. Then for the banks. The richest ones are off the western islands. We can gather shell in fifteen fathoms, where them Chinamen and dagoes can't reach with their old-fashioned outfits. We can work all summer around them islands and rot enough shell to make us all rich for life."

"And you're going to come right along," said Mrs. Thrale, turning to Tevis sweetly, "and so is Miss Braisted and the lord. Mighty pleasant sailing down there on the Gulf. Mazatlan—La Paz. You just *ought* to see La Paz! Palms, white beach, bright, warm sun—just like places you find in fairyland."

"I've never been to fairyland," said Tevis, rather testily, though somehow he could not help feeling that the dominant force of this strange woman was bound to work in its own way.

But they had spoken of entering port at Mazatlan and La Paz. This seemed a risky thing to do with a stolen steamer. If they did so, might it not be possible for him to escape and help Hazel ashore, too? So, while he talked with the Thrales about the poaching enterprise and seemingly fell in with their plans, he was quietly plotting, on his own account. He saw a stout Mexican harbor master in charge of the yacht, a few days delay

in telegraphing and then a quick return to San Diego.

Yet—such is the perversity of human nature and particularly of human nature in love—he saw, too, that if the plot of the Thrales unwound as they wished, he should not be so very miserable, for were there not here adventure and hazard such as tame, shore-going folk never dreamed of—bits of brisk living not to be scorned by a man with red blood in his veins—and, best of all, for a shipmate the most winsome young woman in all the world?

CHAPTER IX

A GLANCE FORWARD

BUT even though he was capable of this healthy though irregular sentiment, there could not fail to come to him a feeling of depression when, on the morrow, as they steamed past the brown cliffs of the San Benito Islands, keeping well to seaward and out of the line of the coasting trade, he saw Hazel Braisted leaning against the rail and looking wistfully astern, with sadly drooping head.

To a beauty such as hers sorrow adds its own charm, and in her grieving state she was more interesting than ever. He wondered what he might do to relieve and hearten her.

“Good morning, Miss Braisted,” he said, passing aft after a hesitating moment.

“Good morning, Mr. Tevis!” A look of encouragement came into her face as she turned to him, though her next words were cheerless enough: “Isn’t this terrible,—to have one’s own yacht stolen and to be carried off in her without knowing one’s destination? And to think—father hasn’t the remotest idea where I am, and I don’t know whether or not he and Mrs. Poindexter got safely

ashore in the boat—it was so foggy and squally and all.”

“Oh, they’re all right,” was his hasty assurance. “The boat could have been rowed ashore in half an hour. They were only a little way out, you know.”

She looked at him gratefully out of the liquid depths of her dark brown eyes.

“You don’t know how cheering your words are to me,” she said, brightening as she spoke. “I suppose it’s awfully foolish for me to worry. I couldn’t sleep all last night.” She glanced at the patent log. “But we’re getting miles and miles away from San Diego. Where in the world are we going?”

He looked at her and wondered if it would be wise to let her know the scope and purpose of the voyage. While he hesitated she went on:

“I have a little compass in my cabin, and according to it we are sailing due south. I had hoped it would be north, for then we might be putting into some Californian harbor where I could telegraph to father.”

While deciding whether it would be best for her to know what to her might seem the desperate enterprise of the Thrales upon which her yacht was going, he talked quietly with the girl, in a reassuring voice. Without attempting to play the part of uninvited champion or to thrust his services upon her, he wished her to understand that he would make it the greater part of his duty to see

that, although she was surrounded by strange men and the strangest of all women, no harm should come to her.

He was rewarded by a confident smile on the girl's face and even by a return of some of that gayety of spirit which he had seen from the first was characteristic. Still there were recurrent moments of depression.

"But my father," she sighed dejectedly—"he won't know what has become of me. He will worry himself to death. You don't know how he—he cares for me. And I—I'm so uncertain about him. Do you really think, Mr. Tevis, that he got ashore safely?"

"Certainly," reaffirmed Tevis. "He must have done so. And it's more than likely that by this time it is known that it was the schooner and not the yacht that burned."

"In that case, and if he thought I were aboard here, he would be after us in the fastest boat he could charter," said Hazel. Then she glanced down at the fleeing ferment of white whipped up by the yacht's propeller and forward to the long low line of water that broke from her bow and shook her head sadly. "No—Captain Dumble said there wasn't anything along the coast that could overhaul the *Thetis*."

"But she'll lay-to somewhere before long," were Tevis' encouraging words. "Thrall and his wife can't carry out their plans without doing that."

“What *are* their plans?” asked the girl wonderingly, looking at him keenly out of intent, expectant eyes.

Tevis still hesitated. Then, as he saw no good reason for not apprising her of the pearl-poaching plot, he told her all he knew about it.

“Oh, the pirates!” declared the girl at the end of the recital. “Of course they don’t intend to harm us—they’re evidently not that kind; but to think they would steal my yacht to go into a business like this! Dear old *Thetis*! Why, you know the last time she went on a long voyage we had six missionaries and their wives aboard. And for the *Thetis* to turn pirate! What would Mrs. Poin-dexter say?”

Tevis thought he caught a reflection of the glamour of romance in the girl’s tone and it occurred to him as he recalled his own reckless feeling of the previous night that to human nature, in women as in men, the lure of adventure was something rarely to be denied. Even while the thought was in his mind, the girl, pulling the visor of her white yachting cap a little further over her splendid dark eyes and brushing back with her ungloved fingers a flutter of vagrant hair, said reflectively and with a quiet smile:

“I suppose, after all, there’s a bit of the Viking in me, for don’t you know, if I wasn’t so worried about father, I shouldn’t greatly mind a voyage like this—my life has been *so* conventional. If one could leave out the killing part, do you think it

would be so awfully, awfully wicked to be a pirate? Oh, how my Puritan ancestors would groan on hearing that! Have you talked with Mrs. Thrale?" Her face took on a piquant look. "She's a Puritan if ever there was one. She's full of the quaintest New England notions—and religious! You wouldn't think it, to hear her scold the men. She came in and read a chapter of the Bible to me last night. It was from the 'Book of Job,' and really it seemed to do me good. But *think* of it—a Puritan pirate!"

She laughed, but her face soon changed as she gazed astern, and he knew she was thinking of the widening of the distance between her and her father.

As he was leaving her to go forward she said, with a little note of fervency that was all her own and that was one of her charms of manner:

"I'm so glad you have talked with me, Mr. Tevis. You don't know how it has cheered me."

Just as he left her to go forward he saw Walden approaching them. The Englishman was smoking a cigar and muttering something to himself about the "rotten service" aboard ship under the new regime.

"Just fancy!" he complained, speaking more to Hazel than to Tevis, whom he eyed with a shade of distrust. "I had to ring for a boy six times just now before he would come, and what do you think the fellow's excuse was? He was polishing the silver for Mrs. Thrale."

“There’s New England housewifery for you!” said Miss Braisted, laughing. She’ll polish it down thin before she leaves the yacht.”

“And when she goes she’ll carry off what’s left of it—you see,” said Walden fiercely.

“No,” said Tevis. “I think it’s this way about Mrs. Thrale: She’d warp her ideas of marine morality to borrow the yacht to carry out her own and the captain’s schemes, but as for the silver, she wouldn’t take as much as a souvenir coffee spoon. She wouldn’t even let her cat scratch one of the leather chairs.”

He turned to go.

“Hold on, Tevis,” said Walden. “You say you’re not in the plot, and I suppose we’ll have to take you at your word. But would you mind telling me what all this means?”

“No; I don’t mind,” replied Tevis. He felt ill at ease in the company of the baronet. Still, as he ran over the plans of the Thrales he could see that Walden, tremendously concerned because of what was going forward, was drawn a little nearer to him as the result of his new knowledge. The Englishman said nothing for a time, but stood leaning against the rail, thoughtfully puffing his cigar, while Hazel sat in a wicker chair, gazing astern or glancing sadly at the patent log near her elbow as it reeled off the miles that were dividing her from her father.

In relating the plan to Miss Braisted and Walden it had been glossed over in certain disagree-

able phases by the thoughtful Tevis, who did not wish to alarm the girl more than was necessary. When he left the two to go forward, he had hardly reached 'midships before he felt Sir Charles' big hand upon his shoulder.

"Look here, old chap," said the baronet in a less haughty tone than he had yet addressed him, and with his large front teeth gleaming in a friendly smile. "I want to know more about this. Come down into my room, where we can be alone, and smoke a cigar with me."

"All right," said Tevis, "only I can't stay very long as I have some work to do on the dynamos."

"What I want to know," said Walden as he sat on a little divan opposite Tevis and the two men lighted their cigars, "is what kind of a mess we're likely to get mixed up in."

"Well," replied Tevis, "we shall have to deal with Chinamen and Mexicans—that is, if we get into any trouble."

"Dear me," said Sir Charles, his bronzed face taking on a worried look, "what kind of trouble are we likely to get into? You see I'm relying on you in this matter altogether. There's no one else to tell me anything. You assure me you're not in the plot and I'm taking you at your word."

"Thank you," said Tevis a little dryly, "but as to the kind of thing we're running up against, I can't tell precisely, because I have never been on a pearl poaching expedition before, and the Thrales are a little vague in their information.

What has been done in that line, so far as I have ever heard, has been by Mexicans who have poached upon the pearl banks after their government had sold the concessions to Chinamen. Of course it's a long way from civilization, the place where we're going, and these fights don't get reported in the papers very often; but I remember a lively one in which eleven Mexicans who had been poaching on the banks were killed by junkmen who stood up for their rights."

Walden gazed silently through a port hole and smoked thoughtfully for a while.

"But doesn't the Government afford the pearl fishers any protection?" he asked. "Diaz is a wise chap, they say. I should think he would do something, don't you know?"

"Even if he did, that wouldn't better matters any for us," replied Tevis. "For if the Thrales insist upon this poaching business, we'll be in trouble on that side as well."

"Gad!" said the baronet, his big bovine eyes squinting with an apprehensive frown. "If that's the case we're going to get it both ways."

"Yes, unless, as Thrale says, we go to work so quietly at night with our submarine lights that they don't catch us at it."

"Oh, but a craft like this—they don't ever see 'em down this way—is bound to attract attention. They'll watch every move we make, don't you think?"

"No doubt," replied Tevis.

“And pot us like partridges from the most unexpected places.”

“Very likely. The Gulf is patrolled by a cruiser—sometimes two, so Thrale says—and the pearl fishers all carry rifles and revolvers. Those junk men are generally pretty good fighters, though I don’t know what they could do against a crowd of Americans like us. We have two gun-racks, fully stocked, and thousands of rounds of ammunition. But, of course, we might be surprised either by a gunboat or a fleet of junks and taken at a disadvantage.”

“In other words,” summed up Walden, with a dubious shake of the head and a tremor in his voice, “if we’re not blown out of water by the Mexicans we’ll have all our throats cut by the Chinamen. Pleasant prospect in either case!”

“Oh, I think if it came to a scrap with the junkmen,” said Tevis confidently, “we could stand them off, and as for the cruiser we ought to be able to show her a clean pair of heels.”

“When you look at that miserable little bounder—that Captain Thrale—you wonder where he gets the pluck to go into this thing.” The baronet knocked the ashes from his cigar. “But of course it’s that big, raw-boned Yankee wife of his—she’s put him up to it and she’s keeping up his nerve for him. Jove, it’s a rotten situation. She’ll get us into a mess, you can lay your life on it.” He paused a moment and then added confidentially: “I wouldn’t care so much, Tevis, but for one

thing. It isn't known among our friends on either side, but under the circumstances, I don't mind telling you—Miss Braisted and I are engaged to be married."

Tevis' blue eyes turned away. To retain his smile after this definite confirmation of his fears was hard for one of his frank nature. Well, he had had his dream and it was ended. But the marvel remained: What could a young woman of her spirit and her ideals see in this man? Doubtless it had all been arranged between the baronet and her father and she had consented to please a parent who would be proud to hear his daughter called Lady Walden.

"Indeed!" said he at last, with an effort. "Permit me to congratulate you."

"Yes—charming girl—very amiable parent—man of considerable means—stands high among American financiers."

Then he had not heard of Braisted's failure! Tevis looked at the man curiously. What would he do if he knew? Should he tell him? If he were a fortune-hunter, as he suspected, he might desist from carrying out his marital plans.

But he had seen little of Walden and he owed to a distinct and it might be unfair prejudice toward him. For all he knew, the man might be a very decent fellow. He reflected that this must be so, else why should the gentle, cultured Hazel Braisted have considered him for a moment? It was possible that his heavy British way really con-

cealed a nobler man than he had yet seen in him. Then again the Braisted fortune might be intact and not even threatened—he had only Captain Thrale's hazard as to that—or rather Dumble's as translated by Thrale—and the financier's situation might not have called for the sacrifice of the yacht for the insurance.

“Well,” said the baronet, as Tevis rose to leave the stateroom, “I suppose all we can do is to trust to luck and pray they mayn't pot us when we get down there. Hope we'll get shunted off by the authorities before we get there. Maybe we can contrive it somehow ourselves.”

“I'm with you,” declared Tevis, thinking of Hazel's danger, “and I'll do what I can.”

He went below and into his own room, crushed by the revelation Sir Charles had just made to him and with the hopelessness of his great and consuming love. He sat down heavily upon his bunk and stared dejectedly out of the little round window upon the sunny, laughing sea. The bright flashing waves mocked his heart and rode over and drowned it in the blind depths below.

After a while he rose, put on his working clothes and cap and hastened below to the dynamo-room. Going to the tool-box, he took out his wrench, pliers and brushes and quickly attacked a disabled dynamo, fiercely twisting and threading the wires, screwing up the contacts, fighting like a Theseus against the dragons that assailed him, while out of the wild flashes from the arcing brushes, as he test-

ed the dynamo, rose impossible visions, and out of the hum and burr of the machine came a despondent note as that of a voice that mocked his love.

CHAPTER X

THE DIFFICULT ISLANDS

THE yacht lay-to in a little cove off the island of Espiritu Santo in the soft southern twilight, rolling gently on a summer sea, with the steady swish and thud of the breakers sounding abroad and the circling, squawking sea birds making a great to-do about the galley refuse. Miss Braisted and Sir Charles were under the after awning, looking ashore and talking in the desultory way which had often assured Tevis' prejudiced mind that, as an engaged pair, they were wholly unsuited to each other.

He went over to where Flamel stood on the look out.

As Tevis approached him, the first officer said:

"Well, here we are! Isn't this a great place and a great evening? It's what you get in the tropics, though we're just a little too far north for a peep at the Southern Cross."

"It's the kind of thing you read about," said Tevis. "When do we begin our diving? The Captain hasn't said anything about commencing right away."

"Oh, we'll be all day to-morrow getting the

things ready," replied Flamel. "It will be to-morrow night, I guess, before we start to work. The island looks like a picture in the twilight, doesn't it? But wait till morning, and it will show up ugly enough." He pointed toward the land, which rose gently from the gleaming white sands of the beach up to the long saw-tooth range, softened with a purple glory that was not of earth.

"It's as brown and dead and dry as a desert at this time of year," he went on. "Nothing but cactus and agaves. And it's the same on all the islands from Caralbo up to Angel de la Guarda. You'll hardly find a soul on them, except probably a few goat herders, though I believe there's a band of fierce natives on Tiburon—the Seris. They're all pretty well rockbound, these islands; and there's no end of shoals and reefs and nasty currents about them. A good many sea-going men call this group the Difficult Islands, though that's not the name on the map."

"The Difficult Islands!" repeated Tevis. "That doesn't sound very promising."

"Oh, they'll be dead easy for us," said Flamel. "We've got all the latest charts and there's good surveys of everything."

"Will you tell me," asked Tevis curiously, "why we haven't made port at Mazatlan or La Paz, as the Captain said we would?"

"You needn't think we're hunting up any ports," said Flamel, with a dry little laugh. "Mazatlan wasn't on our sailing schedule at all, nor

La Paz, for that matter. I guess you can understand why."

"But shouldn't we be coaling up before long?"

"Coal? Why, bless you, man, we've got enough coal aboard this yacht for a liner. The bunkers are heaped high and it's stowed in sacks in every nook and cranny, except the after-hold where we're going to put our shell. Even the shaft alley is half full of coal and the lower cold-storage room, and the upper boiler room and the trunk room and the fish well. Besides we have a good sailing rig and can make five or six knots in a fair breeze without the engines, if we have to."

"Why, I thought the *Thetis*——"

"She isn't the *Thetis*; she's the *Searcher*. Oh, I see you're not on. That's what we did off Cape Tosco bright and early in the morning. Perkins did the lettering, stern and bows—he's a mighty neat man with the brush. None of the boats had any marks on them, nor the life buoys so there's no reason why we shouldn't run into port on a pinch, though it's taking chances."

"But supposing she is hailed at sea, or boarded while she's lying to?" Tevis thought he had discerned a large-sized flaw in the scheme.

"We can run away from anything in these waters. But even if they should happen to catch us napping and get aboard we're only the *Searcher*, out on an expedition collecting marine flora and fauna for some American institution these greasers never heard of. We'll be bringing up enough

curiosities with the shell to make that look right, and as for the log, that was all written up yesterday. I did it and I tell you it reads great."

"It might work," was the reluctant admission; "but there's one thing that's been overlooked."

"What's that?"

"Me," said Tevis, his mind taking a tentative turn, "why shouldn't I 'blow' on you poachers and expose the whole plot?"

"Because," said Flamel, smiling, "you'll take too much interest in the game."

There was a rattling forward and a splash in the stillness.

"There goes the anchor!" said the first officer.

Captain Thrale was going forward with the steward, to whom he was giving some orders.

"Tell me," said Tevis to Flamel, looking at the Captain, "how is that little schooner master able to take hold and run this steamer?"

"Aw, there's no mystery about running a boat like this," he laughed lightly. "You could do it—anybody could do it—nothing easier. All you've got to do is to have competent officers and hands, and for anybody like the old man, who's been to sea all his life to step from a sailing vessel to the Captain's place on a steam yacht is as easy as falling off a yardarm. And with Mrs. Thrale and her cat to look out for him, I guess he'll get along all right."

Flamel laughed again, his tanned face wrinkling. Tevis' views of the gravity of the crime of

collecting pearls in depths to which the crude native divers and Chinese could never venture, began to fall in with those of the first officer. In his present state of mind he cared little what might be going forward, and even though he had at first considered himself as a pressed man and had acted accordingly, he no longer made any show of demurring.

Next morning found him in blouse and overalls, down in the hold, working in his old nervously eager way, getting out the electric material. The men, most of whom were web-footed Swedes, labored with such zest and alacrity—they were all on lays, as Tevis soon learned—that they were ready with the helmets, tubes, wires and lamps by noon. The scheme of lighting was simple. Long coils of heavily insulated cable were to be stretched from the yacht's generator into the boats from the ends of improvised yards. Each boat was supplied with a tall mast at the foot of which was a reel. The wire worked through a pulley at the top of the mast and then down, through the reel, to the lamp, which was fastened to the top of the diver's helmet, just like a miner's light.

In each boat, beside the reel, there was placed an air machine and two wire baskets in which the pearls were to be collected. By the old-fashioned method a signal rope was used, but Tevis had arranged to dispense with this, and to use the lighting wire instead.

There was a trial of the lighting, in which the

divers clumped over the deck in their leaded boots, the powerful lights gleaming from the crests of their great helmets, though the sun was shining brightly.

Miss Braisted watched this dress rehearsal intently, her large eyes lighting up with curious interest. The big-snouted helmets appealed strongly to her sense of the grotesque and she laughed merrily whenever one of the divers shook his head or turned suddenly. She hovered near them, and seemed to get as much entertainment out of their doings as she would from a vaudeville act. She was dressed in a smart suit of white duck, and wore the little white cap which sat so becomingly upon her black, wavy hair, with its rebellious fluffs and wisps which the wind brushed lightly against her soft round cheek. Tevis was glad of her presence, but it brought him no peace. Several times while he was connecting up or coiling the wires, he had to pause from the sheer attraction of her charming face and of her divinely rounded figure, topped by the heaven of her hair, and to steal glances at her. But there was always a sigh in his heart as he turned away.

When she walked along the deck, the animated smile and the bending grace by which, unlike Sir Charles, she made obvious the fact that she did not hold herself airily aloof from the human creatures that surrounded her, made her very popular with the crew. Her buoyancy of manner and her modest and gentle way, despite her constrained posi-

tion as a prisoner on her own yacht, had, aided by her natural beauty, made easy conquest of the hearts of all aboard. It was clear that in interesting herself in the preparations for the pearl-gathering she was making the best of the situation.

As for Sir Charles, he sat gloomily in his wicker chair under the after-awning, smoking or reading a magazine and did not follow Hazel as she went about the deck from boat to boat watching the workmen.

Once Tevis saw her looking landward, but it was not with a longing gaze, for as Flamel had fore-shown, the island as seen by daylight was barren and inhospitable enough. There were only a few strips of verdure in sight from the mouth of the cove, and these were merely scrubby-looking patches of chaparral in the folds of the brown and barren hillsides on which here and there a spindling agave or a forbidding cactus thrust up its spikes to the fiercely burning sun.

"Is it any wonder," asked Tevis, pausing beside her, when the deck rehearsal was over, "that they call these the Difficult Islands?"

"No, indeed," she replied. "If they're all like this they're difficult enough. It's a name that tells the whole story. And yet this little cove, with its white beach and water birds, looks very peaceful."

"Peaceful, but not inviting," he suggested.

"No; distinctly not inviting," she said with a smile. "But see those black rocks sticking their heads above water out there," she waved her hand

in the direction of a long, high point to the southward, which projected itself brokenly into the sea, its dark rock masses splashed by flying spray. "Don't they remind you of Stevenson's 'Merry Men?' "

Before he could reply she started up with a cry. "What's that?"

For around the point, well out of reach of the rocks a queer sail and a high dark hull showed with the suddenness of a vitascope picture. The craft was coming on under a light outside breeze.

What a strange boat!" she cried. "I never saw anything like it before. It's something like the pictures of the old galleons."

The new-comer was, indeed, an odd craft. She was low amidships and high in bow and stern, and she carried on her single slanting mast a great lug-sail, fluted against dozens of small yards.

"It's a Chinese junk," exclaimed Tevis. "I've seen them sailed by shrimp-catchers in the Bay of San Francisco. There's another. Wonder what they're up to here!"

CHAPTER XI

WHAT THE DIVERS BROUGHT UP

CAPTAIN THRALE was standing on the forward deck, his glass to his eyes, gazing at the junks. and Hazel went over to him while he looked narrowly and nervously at each boat. By the time a third junk had appeared Mrs. Thrale came up and joined the group on deck, her black hawk-eyes sharply alert.

“Goodness me!” she exclaimed, taking the glass from the Captain’s hand and staring through it at the strange craft. “Ain’t they filthy looking things? That deck hasn’t been scrubbed for ten years. And talk about tempting Providence! Why, them boats are about as sea-worthy as so many chopping-bowls.”

“I’m afraid,” began the Captain, anxiously, “that they’ll be up to mischief.”

“Them pig-tails, them mice-eating, laundry-men?” snorted Mrs. Thrale contemptuously. “Gracious sakes! I wouldn’t be afraid of them. They ain’t got the spirit of guinea pigs. Want to look at ’em, Miss Braisted?” she asked, turning to Hazel and handing her the glass.

The girl peered through the binoculars and exclaimed:

“What a lot of Chinamen! The boats are alive with them.”

“And vermin,” added Mrs. Thrale. “Wouldn’t Port have a time with the rats aboard that boat? Well, of course, they’re out for pearls. I saw a stack of shell on the deck of that nearest one and she’s got some small boats in tow. I believe I can smell her from here.”

The lug-sail slanted under the stiff breeze and the first junk tacked a little nearer.

“It’s the On Yick Company, that’s what it is,” said the Captain reflectively. “They’ve got *Espiritu Santo* and three or four islands above. Wish we hadn’t dropped anchor here. See that fellow come on? He’s too blamed curious to suit me.”

“My land!” cried Mrs. Thrale. “A scurvy lot of Chinks like that ain’t going to scare me. I could shoo ’em off like so many hens. I’d like to know! There! They’re gone off on the other tack. They ain’t going to bother a big boat like this.”

“Where do you suppose they hail from, Captain?” asked Tevis.

“From some camp down the island,” he replied, breathing freer as he saw the junks sail by. “On Yick works a lot of men and takes out stacks of shell. He used to have a six-year concession from Magdalena Bay north. Now he’s got the islands. He takes turtle, too, and whale and seal and aba-

lones—anything he can get his hooks onto. But he's a hull year doing most nothing in the pearl business. Just wait till *we* get to work. It won't be close in shore, where the water's waist deep, and the bank's fished out. But all the same," he added, "I wish them highbinders hadn't showed up the first day. Looks like bad luck."

The afternoon was very hot. Sir Charles stretched in his steamer-chair under the awning, smoked steadily and stared dumbly seaward over the blue gulf, on which the long swells lazily rose and fell. He seemed to be in the sulks and was heavily lethargic.

Dinner, or as Mrs. Thrale would have it, "supper," was served at four bells—"an ungodly hour," according to Sir Charles, who, on reaching the table, ordered the Jap to fetch him a bottle of port. He and the Captain had generally drank a glass or two of claret or some other light wine at dinner, by the tacit permission of Mrs. Thrale, who, however, always signalled sharply with her eyes when the Captain fingered the bottle, and scowled when he ventured to pour out a third glass. But this time the two convivial ones not only finished the first bottle of port, but were preparing to attack another.

"You were speaking of black pearls," said Hazel to Tevis, as he sat next to her at the table, "are they all that are found here?"

"Oh, no," said he. "There are plenty of white

ones, too, according to the reports. But the black ones are almost as valuable as the white."

"Is it true that pearls can be made artificially?" she asked. "I've read about their putting shot into the shells of live oysters and that large gems would form around them."

"Oh, that's right enough," said the Captain, who under the loosening agency of the wine was unusually free of tongue. "Chinamen do that. I'll bet On Yick does it. Chinamen even take little images of Buddha and put 'em into the live oyster and the pearl forms all around 'em."

"Wonderful!" said Hazel.

"Yes; but they ain't much good," said Thrale. "Expersh can tell 'em every time."

He reached for the bottle again and was about to pour out another glass of wine when Mrs. Thrale gave a warning sniff, and her forehead drew together in its fierce bars, while her black eyes gleamed with something more than mere disapproval. The neck of the bottle went to the glass, just a bit unsteadily.

"Captain!"

Thrale started up and a great blotch of port reddened the cloth, and yet he was about to pour out his glass at all hazards, when his wife cawed forth again:

"Mercy, Captain Thrale, you've spoiled this table cover! Set that bottle right down. I'd like to know! Haven't you had more'n enough for one night? I'm saying nothing about them that makes

a business of wine-drinking"—she glanced toward the baronet—"for that's about all they can do anyhow; but you've got a lot of work before you to-night, Captain, and you've got to keep your head. I think we've had about enough tippling for this trip, anyway. Wine is a mocker and strong drink is raging, but I'm going to take good care it don't rage aboard this ship any more."

"Why, my good Mrs. Thrale," said Walden, "you don't mean you're going to forbid wine at table."

"You needn't 'good Mrs. Thrale' me," said the head of the board, frowning, as she went around the table and sprinkled salt on the splotched cloth. "I'm not only going to forbid the horrible stuff at table, but I'm going to do more than that. You'll see what I'll do. I'm not going to have any more drunkenness aboard this ship. I saw MacLaren, the chief engineer, looking like he'd been sampling some of them bottles. That kind of thing has got to stop."

Sir Charles said no more. While Hazel and Tevis talked of the pearls—she with that well-bred air which passes over a "scene" so easily, and he with recurrent feelings of disgust for the other three, and particularly for Sir Charles—the baronet lapsed into the sulks and drank defiantly until the second bottle was emptied. But Captain Thrale did not touch his glass again.

After dinner Tevis stood amidships with the Captain, watching the sun as it hung low over the

pink and purple sea. They were both eager for the approach of night and the first dip of the divers. Tevis felt that it was strange that, from actual rebellion toward the enterprise, he had changed his attitude, so as now to be ready to fling himself into it with reckless abandon; but it was not merely the novelty of the adventure and his professional pride in the outcome of the engineering plans that compelled him. He wanted to plunge into the work and forget himself utterly. And so the sun could not sink quickly enough for him nor the shades of evening fall too fast.

Tevis noted a group of pantrymen, among whom were Yokio and the cook, hoisting some loaded baskets by a line from the lazarette. He wondered a little at this, as it was no part of the preparations for the night. But soon Mrs. Thrale came forward from the cabin, followed by her cat, and gave some orders to the pantrymen, who carried the heavy baskets from the hatchway to the rail, straining under their burdens.

“What’s she doing now?” the Captain muttered. The men lifted the contents of the baskets above the rail and threw them into the sea, like so many sticks or stones, heaving them in one by one or two by two as they chanced to pick them up. “Well, I’ll be keelhauled if she ain’t throwing all our liquor bottles overboard!”

He started forward in a strained way, and Tevis followed him. With her own hands Mrs. Thrale was helping to jettison the contents of the wine

closet. She was heaving the bottles overboard with scornful flings and a fierce delight.

“Why, Emily!” the Captain protested, with a mournful shake of his head. “What in the world are you doing?”

She made a determined downward sweep with her hand and a big flask struck the water with a spiteful splash.

“Doing what I ought to done in the first place,” she declared. “The mocker ain’t going to mock me, I can tell you. I’m going to clean out that hull wine closet before I’m an hour older.”

The Captain made a despairing gesture, and said under his breath, “Good Lord! What a woman!”

Glass vessels of all sizes from pint Chianti flasks to claret demijohns were now splashing into the water at a merry rate. Some of the men pitched bottles from one side of the yacht and some from the other, while two kept hoisting up the baskets through the hatchway. Mrs. Thrale worked harder than any of the men, flinging in gallon demijohns with grim delight. She was in the thick of the destruction when Sir Charles sauntered unsteadily along deck, smoking a cigar. He paused with a puzzled look for a moment and then said:

“Chucking over old soldiers, eh? Gad, I didn’t think there were so many aboard.” He laughed, and, going over to the side, looked at one of the baskets. “Great Scott! What does this mean? Hold on there, you fellow!” he roared catching the

uplifted arm of the nearest man. "That's good Chablis you're throwing overboard. Let's see the label. 'Fifty-three.' Why, that wine's worth three guineas a quart, and you're tossing it away by the dozen."

"Yes," cried Mrs. Thrale, scornfully, passing him with an armful of bottles, "and if it was worth a hundred guineas, it would go just the same." She threw a bottle with a vicious fling and it chugged into the water like a stone, as she cried, "I'd like to know!"

"My God, woman, do you realize what you've got there? It's Moselle!" He grasped from her hand the bottle she was about to throw into the sea. 'Coblenz, 1848.' From the Prince's own cellar."

Mrs. Thrale glared at the man who had dared to prevent her righteous action, the bar sinister showing fiercely on her forehead.

"Look here, Mister Lord!" she shrieked! "You leave them bottles be! Don't you dare touch one of 'em! I don't know anything about your Prince's cellar. I don't care where any of this stuff comes from, but I know where it's going to. Stand off and don't you dare interfere! I'd like to know!" She seized the bottle from his hand and it followed the others.

"But you've no idea what this wine is worth!" groaned Walden. "You couldn't buy it for less than twenty dollars the quart. It's sparkling Mo——"

“Go ’way!” she fulminated. “Go ’way and mind your own affairs. I ain’t buying any wine; I’m getting rid of the beastly stuff. There’s a thousand bottles that’s got to go. It will all be cleaned out. I want that wine closet to stow shell in.”

“Gad!” cried Walden. He looked about from one destroyer to the other, and, with amazing expertness, told off the work of destruction, with despairing groans:

“Amatillado! Lafitte! Chartreuse! Yquem—rare old Yquem, bottled at the chateau. By jove! This is enough to make a man sick. Chianti vecchio! Epernay! My good woman, you’re not going to throw away all that champagne!”

Mrs. Thrale made no reply. She merely set her teeth and worked hard, with a red face and fierce forehead.

Walden became desperate as the champagne began to splash into the sea, and with his desperation came recklessness. Tevis and Flamel watched him amusedly as he gazed at the tragic work. He clenched his hands, he ground his big teeth and the veins in his forehead bulged. Port, the white cat, knowing no partisanship in this acute situation, came along the deck and sidling up to the baronet, rubbed his glossy fur against the infuriated man’s leg, arching his back and purring in a friendly tone.

“Ah,” said Walden, reaching down excitedly and lifting up the cat. “I know what will stop this

beastly business. I say, Mrs. Thrale, listen to me a moment!"

The sea hawk paused, a bottle of champagne in each hand and a questioning look in her face.

"Well, I'd like to know!" she said simply.

"You see this cat?" he said firmly. "You value him very highly, don't you, even if his name is Port, which you toss overboard with disdain? Now I wish to warn you very plainly that if any more of those bottles are thrown into the sea, your cat goes too." He glanced at her angrily, and then held the cat over the rail.

"Angels and ministers of grace defend us!" breathed Flamel to Tevis, looking toward Mrs. Thrale, "What's coming now? Get on to that visage! Talk about your dark, lowering thunder storms!"

And, indeed, the sea hawk's face was stormy. It was something more—it was cyclonic. Her black eyes snapped like electric sparks.

"Merciful goodness! gracious sakes alive!" she screeched, standing with her shoulders curved over and one hand clutching a champagne bottle raised threateningly. "Well, I'd like to know! Do you expect I'm going to stand that kind of talk from *you*? Not for one little minute—not if you had all the Houses of Parliament and the King of your little islands at your back." She took an angry stride forward while Walden turned hesitatingly, holding the cat over the deck. "Drop that cat!"

she squawled. "Do you hear, Mr. Lord? DROP THAT CAT!"

"Yes, Mrs. Thrale," he said in milder tones. "I'll do it if you'll stop throwing away the wine."

"I'll throw away all the wine I please," she screamed. "But you let that cat alone or I'll have you clapped into irons. Do you hear what I say? *Irons!* I'd like to know!"

"I hear you, madame, but——"

She looked at him with her hard, glittering, compelling eyes—a long steady, staring look. He answered the gaze, one cold gray eye behind its shielding monocle, the other squinted a little in the low searching sunlight which he faced as he faced the woman.

"It's a fight of optics," whispered Flamel to Tevis. "Ten to one on the black!"

The hard-faced, dominating Yankee woman and the round-featured, defiant Briton stood staring at each other amid perfect silence. Two or three times Walden's lips moved as if he were about to speak, and once, without withdrawing his gaze, he made a motion as if to toss the cat overboard. Meantime Port writhed and struggled to be free and clawed at his captor's beard, but Walden held him firmly until Mrs. Thrale made an hypnotic downward movement with her hand, when he looked at her weakly, shrugged his shoulders a little and let go of the cat, which as it scrambled to the deck, gave him an ugly scratch on the back of his hand.

"I'd like to know!" was all the victorious woman said.

Walden, awed and humbled, turned away, while Mrs. Thrale resumed her lightening of the cellar. When the last basket was brought up he walked aft, shaking his head and muttering low curses along the deck.

"I knew the hawk eyes would win," commented Flamel. "Poor chap! He hated to see that champagne go overboard and the other stuff."

"I'm glad it's gone," said Tevis simply and with an air of relief.

"You needn't throw *that* in," said Mrs. Thrale quietly to Yokio, setting aside a dozen quart bottles that bore plain hand-written labels. "That's my elderberry wine. I brought it aboard from the schooner. I didn't mean you should bring it up here. I ain't going to have it thrown away—not much."

"I'm glad of it," said Miss Braisted earnestly when Tevis laughingly told her what Mrs. Thrale had done. "Sir Charles is inclined——" She broke off reservedly and smoothed back a stray wisp of her rebellious hair. "When do you begin the pearl-fishing, Mr. Tevis?"

"At eight bells," said he. "It will be quite dark then, and we can work unmolested."

"Do you think," she asked with a worried little look, "that there's any danger? Those Chinamen—are they likely to return and be troublesome?"

“Oh, don’t bother about them,” said he with an air of unconcern, though they had been upon his mind. Three junkloads of desperate hatchetmen might not afford a very pleasant diversion, if they were bent on driving poachers away from grounds for which they had paid good money to exploit. Still he would not have minded a brush with them had she not been aboard. “You see,” he added quietly, “our work will be at night, when they’re asleep in their camps.”

Up to the time the boats were to be lowered he remained with Hazel on the after-deck. It was very sweet being alone with her and on such a friendly footing, even though their talk for the time was all of the pearl fishing of which she evidently thought he had an endless supply of information, and though he had bitter reminders now and again that there was a great barrier between them. She seemed to be eager for the beginning of the work. Only once did she refer to other matters, and that was when, with a sigh, she spoke of her father, expressing the hope that he was safe and well, and that he was not greatly troubled about her fate. These were her only anxieties, so far as they appeared on the surface. She seemed no longer to chafe unduly because of the restraints of her position. Tevis was vain enough to believe that he had been some comfort to her, for on the cruise down the coast they had discovered many common tastes and particularly in books and music. Indeed, he felt that she found his society

—aboard ship at least—more congenial than that of a man who could enthuse over horses and regattas and little else.

At eight bells the six divers appeared on deck clad in their grotesque suits. Hazel was vastly pleased with them.

“I could look at them all day,” said she to Tevis. “They make me think of those fascinating monsters in ‘Der Freischutz.’ They have eyes like giant June bugs.”

“Yes, and they’ll have antennae enough, too,” said he, “when the ropes and wires are connected with their suits. I hope the trailing lines won’t be too heavy for them.”

The men took their places in the boats. Tevis “connected up” and tested the Nehrsts again, covering each light with a dark cloth, as he did so, and switching off the current immediately. The concealed flashes showed the powerful lamps to be working at their highest candle-power, and it only remained for him and Jim Reynolds, his assistant, to see that a sufficient current was steadily generated. This might keep him down in the engine-room all night, and out of sight of the boats, so that his share in the beginning of the work and until he could safely leave the lighting in the hands of Reynolds would be tame compared with the picturesque duties of the boatmen and divers. Until the signal was given for the turning on of the divers’ lights he remained on deck, his nerves a-tingle with the start of the boats as they stole

off in the darkness, sounding with the lead lines as they went.

“Such a picture!” Hazel said to Sir Charles. “And it seems as though I had a share in the adventure.”

“You should have a share,” he replied. “It’s your yacht. But these pirates—you won’t get a brass farthing out of them.”

It was a picture, as Hazel had remarked, and a strangely captivating one. It was something, too, to see Mrs. Thrale, as she leaned from the bridge and took in with eager, searching eyes, the first oar-strokes in the venture which meant so much to her.

The fever of the hour seemed to communicate itself to Sir Charles, who, strange to say, became most actively interested in the final preparations, though he had hardly glanced at the apparatus before. Tevis saw him and Captain Thrale standing a little apart from the rest, talking earnestly, the Englishman occasionally waving his hand seaward. Walden watched the departure of the boats as though the hazard of the adventure had really gotten into his blood at last, and Tevis jealously saw him motioning out something to Hazel who stood with her elbows on the rail looking at the departing craft, trailing their wires behind them from their masts as they spread out from the ships like the tentacles of an octopus.

It was not until the last boat had disappeared in the darkness that Mrs. Thrale left the deck, and

went down into the engine-room with Tevis to where Jim Reynolds stood at the switchboard ready for the signal to turn on the lights. As they were using a three-core wire the signal would be rung in from each boat. The bells now began to whirr and Tevis switched on light after light. In five minutes after the last light was connected up no more signals were sounded. He knew that the divers were all down and the lights were playing on the sea-bottom. Mrs. Thrale left the engine-room when the last signal was rung in. She hastened up to see if any of the lights were showing above the water. It was for this same reason that Tevis soon afterward turned the generators over to Jim Reynolds and anxiously climbed to the deck.

"They don't none of 'em show exactly," said Mrs. Thrale, when he rejoined her. "But you can almost make 'em out here and there—the nearest ones anyway."

Out of the blankness of the night, down upon the water-level, irregular mist-like patches of luminosity, strangely uncertain to the visual sense, wavered, darkened and straggled forth again in elusive glimmers.

Once or twice Tevis heard a sound as of a basket striking the bottom of a boat, and then a swash as of its being thrown into the water again.

"They're getting up shell all right," said Mrs. Thrale in the low, pleased tone of perfect satisfaction. "They'll make a big haul to-night. Well,

I'm pretty tired. Guess I'll go to bed and get up early in the morning when they come in, and see how much they got."

She left the deck, and a half-hour later when Tevis was about to return to the engine-room, he heard the splash of oars forward of the bow and the call of the Captain:

"How you making out?"

"Bully!" came back a voice from the water.

"Taking 'em in as fast as the baskets'll work."

Tevis was kept busy below deck all the rest of the night, for the circuit was overloaded and he had to watch his generators closely. Then, too, the brushes behaved badly, sparking so much at times that the three bells which meant "more juice" rang in again and again. Not until early morning, when the Captain called down the tube to turn off the current, did he go on deck again.

The gray of dawn was warming to pale pink and the sea lay lead-toned in a liquid hush. All the boats had been hoisted and swabbed and the men had gone below. The deck had been hosed down and of signs of the night's poaching the yacht was as innocent as an old roué after his Turkish bath.

Mrs. Thrale, looking as though she had not combed her hair for the morning, was nagging the Captain as he leaned against the bridge rail, her forehead furrows showing darkly.

"You say you didn't get a shell?" Tevis heard her cry harshly. "Well, I'd like to know! What

you trying to fool me for? Where's the shell? Show it to me. I want to *see* it."

"I tell you, Emily," protested the Captain, with a furtive, hunted look on his sun-burnt face, "we didn't get any shell—not a one. If you don't believe me ask Flamel?"

"Yes; that's right," said Flamel. "The lights worked all right, but the divers didn't get any oysters. But we'll have better luck next time. If this place doesn't pan out there's lots of others."

"But we counted on this cove," cried Mrs. Thrale tenaciously. "José said it was a sure place for 'em. I can't understand it. Where is José? I'm going to find out what kind of a dago liar he is, anyway."

She swept down the stairway, with a lowering face.

If Tevis had confessed it, he was as keenly disappointed as Mrs. Thrale herself and fully as mystified. He stepped up to the Captain just as Sir Charles appeared, smoking a cigar, his face wearing a large smile of animal satisfaction.

"How's this, Captain?" began Tevis. "Have we had our night's work for nothing?"

"*Sh-h!*" he cautioned, putting a finger to his lips and watching his wife out of sight.

Sir Charles laughed, leaned against the house and laughed again.

"*Sh-h!*" warned the Captain, looking about more anxiously than before.

That the easy-going aristocrat who had never

done a day's work in his life should so mock their hard, nerve-straining efforts made Tevis angry. He turned upon him in his rage.

"It's all very well and in excellent taste, no doubt, for you to laugh," he cried, "but——"

"Hold on!" breathed the Captain, in a wheezy whisper. "We ain't worked all night for nothing."

"No; don't worry about that, old chap," drawled Sir Charles. "We've got 'em all—that is nearly all—thanks to your lights."

"Got what?" demanded Tevis.

"The bottles, of course," said the baronet in satisfied tones. "Over eight hundred out of the thousand are safe in the hold."

"No—in the shaft alley," corrected the Captain. "She'll never go down there. But for God's sake, Mr. Tevis, don't breathe a word of it to her. The crew are sworn to secrecy. They'll never tell. Sir Charles is paying 'em a good bonus for their night's work, and each man is to have a couple of bottles of champagne."

"Claret!" It was Sir Charles' turn to correct.

"Well," said Tevis, laughing in spite of himself, though he would rather the wine had stayed at the bottom, "I hope it will be up anchor and away from here; for as long as there's a bottle left in this cove I suppose the men will be searching for it instead of the pearl shells."

"Yes; we're going around the point this afternoon," said the Captain. "Of course the labels are

all soaked off, but it's marvelous how Sir Charles has managed to sort out the different brands by the shape and color of the bottles and so on. He worked all night at it."

"Did he?" Tevis was not able to keep back a bit of sarcasm: "Then he *can* do a little manual labor on a pinch."

Sir Charles was not offended by the sally.

"Oh yes," he replied, good-naturedly, "*that* kind of labor."

"Here she comes," undertoned the Captain, with quick apprehension, as the dark figure of Mrs. Thrale came toward them. "Mind you now, Tevis, not a word—not a word!"

CHAPTER XII

A RACE ON THE BEACH

BUT Mrs. Thrale was full of a great and gleaming satisfaction on the following morning when the results of the second night's work showed themselves in heaped-up piles of "shell," taken from Half-Moon Bay just above the place which the men had come to know as Bottle Cove. The pearl oysters had all been carried ashore to be rotted on the beach. Tevis rowed over in the gig with Hazel and the Captain's wife soon after sunrise when the sea lay like quicksilver and the kelp swayed gently on the smooth swells rolling in-shore. He had had no sleep since the afternoon of the previous day, but he was too much interested to consider that. There would be time for rest later.

They watched the men piling the great oysters on the dry sand above the mark of the highest tide.

"It's a pity they ain't good to eat," said Mrs. Thrale picking up a large shell that had been broken in handling. "I'm hankering for some real oysters." She handed the shell to Tevis. "See if there's a pearl in it," she said.

He opened the silver-tipped mollusk with his

knife and searched in the mantle and muscular tissue for a drop of the precious nacre. He scraped out the oyster and exposed the beautiful, iridescent interior of the shell, with wave on wave of pink, opal and silver gray.

"No pearl," he said, "but something quite as beautiful."

"What is that?" asked Hazel, looking at the mollusk with curious eyes.

"Mother-of-pearl," he said, handing her the shell.

"Yes; it's lovely," said she, "and more wonderful than the pearl itself, but being so common, we don't prize it. There's a multitude of shells in these piles, but I wonder how many pearls."

"Maybe not one in a thousand," he replied.

Mrs. Thrale passed a little way down the beach to speak to the Captain.

"It makes you think of people, doesn't it?" said the girl, poking at the edge of the pile with the toe of her low tan shoe.

"Do you mean there's only one pearl of a person in a thousand?" he asked. "It certainly applies to girls." He looked at her frankly.

"Oh, don't limit it to my sex," she replied, laughingly.

"Of course you had no idea whom I had in mind when I said that?" His burning gaze made her a little uncomfortable.

"Not the slightest," she answered, though with a self-conscious turn of the head.

"You didn't think I referred to you?" he asked daringly.

"Of course not."

"Well, I did."

"Oh, Mr. Tevis," she said, flushing a little and not a bit displeased, "what a ponderous compliment! How shall I return it? There are the sands on the beach," she laughed, "perhaps I could work something out of them."

"I might have known you wouldn't take me seriously," he said, looking at her with mock ruefulness. "Don't you want to walk down the beach a way? The tide is low and the sand is smooth and hard. I feel all cramped up from having been aboard ship so long."

"So do I, and it's glorious walking here along shore." Impulsively she started down the sands by the white rim of the influent foam, and he followed her, reveling in this chance to be alone with her, with no voice but her's and the sea's in his ears. He enjoyed to its fullest their familiar, friendly footing.

She walked quickly, whisking on ahead for the greater part of the first quarter-mile. In her trim, crisp shirtwaist, short gray skirt and cowboy hat, she was very fetching, and there was all the poetry of girlhood in her walk. They were both so full of the freedom of the beach that they almost ran along until suddenly she stopped before a huge mollusk lying on a flat rock.

"What a strange creature!" she exclaimed.

"See, it has breathing holes around the edge of its shell."

"It's an abalone," he explained. "It has only a single shell. The under side of the animal sticks to the rock. It clings so tightly, in fact, that persons trying to pry it up have been known to have their fingers caught in its vise and have been drowned by the rising tide."

He had taken out his pocket knife and was about to insert it between the shell and the rock.

"No; don't do that," she said. "You might get caught." She started on again, her feet twinkling along the sands under the short skirt, her arms moving freely from her well-turned shoulders.

"Don't you feel a long way from civilization?" he asked, looking at the sweet, tanned face, fringed with the dark hair with which the wind was making free.

"Yes," she said, with a laugh and a flash of white teeth; "but for the moment I don't mind it. I'd rather be right here on this beach in this wild Half-Moon Bay, just now than anywhere else—here where people don't count and Nature is everything."

"Yes," he agreed; "Nature is everything here." He looked at her wistfully. Nature was moving potently in him at that moment. Ah, how he would have joyed to fold that form of hers in his arms and tell her what was in his heart!

They were now among the rocks, picking their way over and between them. He sprang upon a

rough rock table and extended his hand down to her where she stood irresolute.

She put her little ungloved hand in his large, strong one and he reveled in the soft, warm feel of it for a rapturous moment while he helped her up to him. Standing side by side upon the rock, they looked out upon the sea as it lay calm and blue before them, and his hand still felt the glow of that blessed, but fleeting contact.

"I don't think we ought to go any further," she said as she turned and looked doubtfully along the craggy shore where the waves swashed with a white outcrash, sending forth glittering showers of spray.

"Oh, just up to that point there," he pleaded. "We've been out such a little while." He sprang lightly from the rock. "This way," he directed. "Jump right down here into this little patch of sand."

She leaped lightly down and he went on ahead, fearing that she might protest against following him much farther.

"Wait a minute!" she cried, her face reddening a little. "I've lost my shoe."

"Where is it?" he asked, springing back to her. He looked about, reached down and picked up the shoe which was half-covered by sand. It was a pretty little thing, that shoe, with a high instep and quite a sensible heel as girl's heels go. His hand hugged it fondly as he shook the sand from it, wiped it on his sleeve and handed it to her.

She slipped it on easily.

"Let me tie it," he said bending over her as she sat upon the stone.

She put out her foot while he dropped upon his knees in the sand and knotted the silk lace into the neatest tie he could make.

"You don't want to go any farther?" he said. "Well, this is a good place to rest."

"No; let's go back to the beach. These rocks are so forbidding—they seem anything but friendly." She rose and, passing around the large rock upon which they had stood, dropped lightly upon the sand where she sat looking off at the circling waves.

He came and sat beside her.

"Isn't it delightful?" she cried rhapsodically. "Such a beautiful beach! I should like to take a dip in that surf. I haven't had a good swim since we left Catalina. I thought the water a little cold there, but Sir Charles didn't mind it."

"Tell me," he said with sudden daring intensity, "what are you marrying that man for?"

She flushed quickly, gave a quick toss of the head and looked at him challengingly.

"How do you know I am marrying him—who told you?"

"He did." He looked straight at her, and her eyes lost a bit of the bravado that was in them.

"Did he?" She bit her lip in plain vexation. "Why it was not to be announced until New Year."

“To be perfectly fair,” said Tevis, “I don’t think he would have told me but for—for—circumstances. But answer me,” he insisted, “with a touch of his old audacity—“why are you marrying him?””

“You are taking a great deal for granted, Mr. Tevis,” she said, with the air of pique still in her tone and in her serious brown eyes. “After all, how long have you known me that you should ask——”

“How long have I known you?” he repeated raptly. “Ages. Don’t you know that there is no such thing as time? We are creatures of the universe, you and I, and what may be a year on this planet may be centuries on another.”

“One world at a time,” she said with a little laugh. “I prefer to arrange my almanac by the revolutions of this one. You see, I am quite earthly.”

“No, you’re not,” he declared ecstatically. “You’re perfectly divine!”

She gave a frightened little glance at him and saw his love lying nakedly in his eyes.

“Oh, Mr. Tevis!” she cried, springing suddenly to her feet, “you mustn’t——”

“Don’t go away!” he said pleadingly and with wistful tenderness as she started toward the boat. “Not just yet!” He rose quickly and stood beside her. “Stay and listen to me. I’m going to tell you——”

"Don't!" she cried in a dismayed tone.
"Don't!"

"Then you know what I am going to say and you forbid me in advance?" he said ruefully. "Is that fair?"

"Yes," she declared stoutly. "It's fair under the circumstances. Remember what we were talking about just now—my engagement." She looked at him with well-affected hauteur that seemed to Tevis to place miles between them. "I don't see how you could—— But of course you don't know how impossible it is—how——"

"But I haven't said anything you could except to yet," he reminded her.

"No," she said, relenting a little. "You haven't said it, and you mustn't even *think* it."

He looked at her with dubious, puzzled brow as they faced each other there in silence, and the long pause was filled in by the voice of the sea.

"And you're always going to hold me at arm's length like this, and discipline me for my very thoughts? That's pretty hard—a man is forbidden even to think." There was a cynical note in his voice. "Come and sit down on the sand again. I'll be tame—that is, for the present. I'll eat out of your hand."

She smiled faintly and sat down with unexpected obedience, though a little farther off than he could have wished.

"That's good," he said, returning her smile. "Now I want you to talk—to tell me about your—"

self and how you came to consider that—that mercenary Walden.”

“But he isn’t mercenary,” she protested. “He doesn’t think of father’s money. The Walden estates are among the largest in England. “If there is any advantage so far as wealth is concerned, it’s probably on his side, as I fear father’s affairs have not been going right of late. I don’t know why I am telling you these things, Mr. Tevis—they are wholly material and sound awfully sordid—but you have been very good to me—very friendly and kind. You are the only one I can look to. I have been counting on you in whatever might happen to me in this perilous adventure.”

“And you *can* count on me,” he said fervidly. “You can count on me to the end of the world. Don’t I owe it to you for saving my life that time in the creek, and besides, though you forbid my uttering it, you know how I love you! There, I have said it, Hazel.”

“But you—Oh, I’m so sorry!” she cried, in a sympathetic tone. “And you—you mustn’t—you *mustn’t* say any more,” she added appealingly. “I am promised to him. Father is bent upon the marriage and his will is iron. Nothing can stand against it.”

“Nothing but love,” he said confidently.

“No; not even that,” she insisted. “We can be ever and ever so good friends, but nothing more.”

She looked at him with helpless, appealing gaze, and there was that in her eyes that made him feel

she had not listened unmoved to his words of love, though she had forbidden them utterance.

“Well, I can’t despair of you—not even after all you have said.” He was standing before her as he spoke, looking intently at the sweet face as it rested upon the dainty hand whose possession he could not so lightly forego. Still gazing at her, his eye glanced past the curve of her shoulder and at once gave a curious, startled look; for over at the edge of the point of rocks which ran down to the water he caught sight of something like an inverted bowl and under it a loose blouse fluttering in the breeze. At the same instant the figure turned and down the bleached, blue back of it waved a jet-black pigtail. The apparition vanished behind the rocks and Tevis sat staring.

“What is it?” she cried.

“Nothing,” he replied reassuringly. “That is—it may have been some animal. Wait here a moment and I’ll go and see.” He hastened along the beach to the point of rocks. He reflected that if the pigtail belonged to one of the On Yick men it might be that the junks were in some cove above them where their divers were at work, and it was likely that the Mongolian was spying upon the yacht and her men. But when he came to the point and scrambled around it, just out of reach of the surf, he saw nothing but another long stretch of sand, walled in by rocky scarps or rounded dunes on which stood lonely clumps of cacti. Of any vestige of human or other life there was none.

He looked sharply along the beach for the prints of sandals, but not a track was visible, and nowhere among the rocks could he find a trace of the man in the blue blouse.

He puzzled for a moment over the swift and complete disappearance of the figure. After all, it might have been a mere simulacrum, attributable to his loss of sleep; and yet he went back to Hazel with a feeling of disquiet.

"Did you see your animal?" she asked.

"No," he replied. "It must have whisked in among the rocks. He stood beside her for a moment, glancing uneasily at the place where the vision had appeared. Isn't it time we were getting back to Mrs. Thrall and her shells?" He started up hastily and added in a light tone to conceal his anxiety. "Wouldn't you like to race back? Such a walker as you must be a good runner. I'll give you a start as far as that big abalone we saw down there and we'll race back to the gig. Come, run! You like to run, I know."

"Very well, I'll race with you, but I don't want more than half that much start."

She tripped down the beach a little way.

"One—two—three—go!" he cried, and she was off with whisking skirts, and tossing hair, running like a fleet filly, her trim, lithe figure flying over the sand. He had not thought much of the race as a race, his only idea being to get her away from the place as quickly and unsuspectingly as possible, but had he counted on an easy victory

in outrunning her, he would have been disappointed. For she was free of limb as an Arab, and her flying feet seemed hardly to touch the ground. He buckled down to the race, and might not have won it, but for the fact that he ran his very best, being determined not to be outstripped in the dash. For while a man may permit a girl to win at chess or even at tennis, he must not let her distance him in a footrace. As it was, however, his victory was slim enough, for he touched the nose of the deserted gig only a yard or two ahead of her.

Laughing and panting, she sat upon the tilted gunwale of the boat, her face flushed and her hair in sweet disarray.

"You see," she cried, "I didn't need to be given much handicap." Her fingers patted her truant side hair.

"I could say something about your running," he said, sitting down beside her on the edge of the boat, "but you made light of my pearl compliment, so I shan't venture one on your fleetness."

"Did I make light of it?" she said in a soft, apologetic tone. "I didn't mean to; but I don't like compliments—they're such empty things. See what a lot of shells they've stacked up over there! The Thrales are thrifty pirates, aren't they?"

The flush of the race was leaving her face now, but there still remained here and there under the clear skin of her temples those azure arborescences of the veins which told of her good blood. Everything about her was at once so vigorous and so

exquisite and yet, after all, the air of the metropolis clung to her and he must still regard her as something exotic; and of course, she was not for him—such divine luck as that was beyond a man of his deserts.

“About the bathing?” he asked. “Shall you be taking that dip you spoke of?”

For reply she shook her head and went toward the shell pile to meet Mrs. Thrale, who was hovering about her treasures. Within half an hour they rowed back to the yacht.

All the boats were coming back, the men sodden and sleepy after their long night's work. Reaching the deck of the yacht, Tevis went immediately to his room and to bed; but it was hours before sleep came, and then it was but fitful, so thoroughly had his whole animate being been wakened by what had happened on the beach.

“I say, my dear,” said Sir Charles when he found his fiancée in the little book-lined alcove off the saloon, “you seem to be wonderfully interested these days.”

“Interested?” She looked up from her book. “No, this is an awfully stupid story—one of your dull English novels in which sporting lords and ladies are taken so seriously.”

“Well, why *aren't* they to be taken seriously?” he asked in his heavy accents. “But I wasn't thinking of books. What I refer to is your being constantly in company with that electrician.”

“Mr. Tevis?” She laughed. “Am I supposed to reply to that absurdity?”

“You are,” he said heavily.

“Very well, I can dispose of it quickly enough. It isn’t so.”

“*But* you were ashore with him just now, and I witnessed through the glass from the deck of this yacht the undignified spectacle of my fiancée—the future Lady Walden—running on the beach with a common electrician.”

“I *was* running on the beach,” fired the girl with rising color; “not with a common electrician, however, but with an uncommon American gentleman, who happens to be an electrical engineer, graduated from one of the best colleges in the country.”

“Oh, in your queer nation I fancy almost anybody passes for a gentleman,” said Walden, with a toss of his great round head; “but that isn’t the point. The point is”—he extended a large red forefinger—“the point is that you are not to be in his company so much. I object to it. I have a right to object.”

“I don’t deny your right,” she said wearily closing the book and putting it back on the shelf. “I am, as you have just reminded me, your fiancée—the future Lady Walden. If I have been undignified I regret it. But I don’t mind telling you I have just enjoyed a happy hour.”

“Then you like that young bounder—you love him?”

"Enough!" she cried warningly, her color mounting. "I hate scenes and you know it. I'll not wrangle with you. I am," she said despairingly, her voice, dying almost to a whisper, "the future Lady Walden."

"That's right," he said, smiling so that he showed his large, white front teeth. "We won't quarrel." And he went away.

She reached forth her hand for another book, took it down and laid it in her lap. But she did not open it, only sat there quietly, chin in hand. Soon her shoulders quivered a little, and, turning, she bent her head down against the pillowed back of the chair, her bosom heaving while she sobbed low. "Of course," she admitted weakly, "he has a right to object."

The afternoon was hot, Tevis' little cabin was stuffy and his pillow was moist under his head when he awoke, but he felt fresh and fit for another night's work. As the generators were now in good condition and his assistant understood the signals perfectly, he was determined that nothing should keep him away from the picturesque end of the operations any longer. So after dinner, which was really breakfast to him, he made it clear to the Captain that it was necessary for him to go out in the boats that night and gain a better idea of the needs of the lighting service. He said nothing to Thrall about the bloused and bowl-hatted figure he had seen on the island, for his elusive coolie

now seemed impossible to him. His imagination, he thought, had doubtless been tricked by one of those mystic mirage effects for which the Gulf shores were famous.

When night closed in and the divers had donned their suits, he went out in the first boat to leave the yacht. In this boat were José, who wore the helmet, and four Swedes, all very handy men, among them being a white-haired young giant named Pederson, who worked the air machine. The night was still, and from the cliffs came from time to time that peculiar hum or subdued roar which is so like to the sound of telegraph wires in the wind. These lonely notes, intermitting between the sobs of the surf, made doleful music, which the Swedes referred to conclusively as the songs of drowned men.

“Ay no gif a damn for deesen Half-Moon Bay,” said Pederson when upon the pulling in of the oars the stillness was broken of a sudden by the ghostly moans from the cliffs. “Ay bin tell Captain Drale Ay dank ve don’t haf no luck here, and yoost remember dot.”

“Oh, Pederson,” protested Tevis, for it seemed to him unfortunate that superstition should begin to work its sinister influence among the men so early in the enterprise. “That’s probably nothing but the echo from the sea.”

“Ay know dose echoen vot you call,” persisted Pederson, “but dose ain’t bin no echoen—dose bin something. Ay bin hear in vun fjord in Norskland

dose noisen. Dot fjord bin full of mans vot is dead an' maken more dead. An' so in deesen Half-Moon, Ay dank so, too."

The other Swedes nodded grave assent. But upon José, who was a Mexican and had cruised all up and down the coast, these utterances of the doleful Swedes, made no impress. The men had helped José off with his helmet that he might enjoy one more cigarette before his descent into the depths, and he sat heavily in his rubber garb, smoking like a furnace. When the air machine had been pumped up and the cable had been uncoiled a little from the reel, Pederson fastened on the helmet again, and said with a sigh:

"Ay leekady hopen he dond bin meetin' some dead mans down below to-night, anyhow. Aber he do, Ay dank he vill bin dead, too, yoost leekady oder mans."

It was a lugubrious send-off for a man about to go down into fifteen fathoms of water, but José went over with a splash, the big round eyes of the helmet giving forth a great glássy stare in the starlight just as they disappeared.

Tevis signalled for the switching on of the current and of a sudden the sea beneath them flashed into a wonderfully lucent green, streaming away on all sides with a pale and still paler gray. The boat swam in a great luminous, ragged patch of water, through which the bottom of the sea, though many feet below, showed plainly. They had the sensation of being in an air-boat rather than in a

water-craft, so transparent was the element in which they floated. From time to time strange little circles of light detached themselves from the central radiance and mounted swiftly to the surface. These were bubbles of air from the outlet valve of the helmet.

Down on the bottom, under the light that shone from his head, José walked about as though he were ashore, his dark body showing weirdly through shifting beams of light and his arms and legs straggling forth grotesquely. The boat in the middle of its perspicuous little pool, followed the slowly moving diver, stern foremost, thus keeping him better in view than if he had been under the bow.

One of the side lines swished violently, sending forth long gleams of light as it cut through the water.

"Haul away!" called Pederson, and up came the wire basket, piled high with shells, coruscating phosphorescently as it dripped over the side. The shells clattered into the boat and the basket shot twinkling down.

This for an hour or two and then Tevis jerked the wire as a signal for José to come up, which he did with astonishing celerity—the body lines being yanked in by one of the men. No sooner was his helmet off than a cigarette was pressed between his lips and lighted by the obliging Pederson who had been trained to this valuable service. Then the men helped him off with the rest of the clumsy

suit, for Tevis had decided to give the diver a breathing spell, by taking a turn below. They pulled the clumsy folds of rubber over him.

“Remember, señor, your feet must keep to the bottom,” cautioned José, as the helmet was raised for adjustment. “The rocks they slip and you are light down there—so light as the cork.”

It requires no little determination to make one's first descent into the sea in a diving dress, even though it be in the bright sunshine, but in the thick dark of a moonless night, one must have the adventure well at heart, or one will back out like a crab. Tevis had in mind, however, the cheering light that would flash from his globe as soon as the water closed over him; so that when through his rubber wrappage he felt the quick chill of the sea, he was not terrified.

It seemed a long time, however, before the inky element all around and above him flashed forth in the blinding light of the hundred-candle-power lamp. His feet, which had been dangling inanely as if in the air, now touched softly upon the bottom.

Standing still a moment, he looked around through his great plate-glass eyes. He was in a cavern of light, walled vaguely by a gray liquid that seemed ready to fall in and engulf him, and this cavern was floored by great rocks, covered by strange crusts and silent masses of seaweed. He felt a queer pressure on his temples, his breath was difficult, his ears sang, and now and then he

was startled by the strange mutterings of the outlet valve; but he was filled with a new elation—the sense of a wonderful novelty. An immense object, like a giant beetle, with straddling legs, moved past, coming so near his eyes, that he started back, nearly losing his balance, as his feet, though weighted with lead, were strangely light and ungovernable, tending all the time to point upward. The thing he had seen was a big green turtle, that swam slowly away in the darkness.

He seized the hook and attacked a scraggly object sticking to a rock. It came away readily enough, and looking at the detached thing in the strange soft light, he judged that it was of the kind of treasure he was seeking.

There were plenty of the mollusks on the rocks; many of them were loose and others adhered tightly. Tevis worked slowly and cautiously, finally conquering his feet so that he could move them readily, but it was at least a half hour before his basket was filled. He pulled the rope and the mass of shells flung heavenward. Then he gave the signal to be hoisted and was up by the side of the boat in the befuddling darkness, feeling the friendly hands of the Swedes helping him in, all adrip and full of the exultance of life. For he had added to his experiences a strangely uncommon one, and he was uncommonly proud of it.

The helmet was taken off and into his lungs rushed the soft, hale air of the southern sea. For the rest of the night he helped at the lines or sat

still and drank in the weird beauty of the unquiet sea and the star-stilled night; the low, dark waves, the black outline of the range that topped the island and, over to seaward, the quiet hull of the yacht. He thought of Hazel, asleep in her cabin, and he wished that she might dream of the two of them sitting on the rock by the seaside.

A low dirge-like moan came floating over the waves from the cliff.

“Yoost you hear dot!” groaned Pederson. “Ay dank ve don’t bin aben some luck in deesen place. Dose dead mans talken too much allady time. Deesen place no good only for dead mans. Dot’s vot Ay dank.”

The diving ceased at midnight, as Mrs. Thrale would permit no work on Sunday, and the men went back to the yacht and to their berths. Tevis stretched himself out in bed, with an electrical lamp at his head, and read for an hour from a book Hazel had lent him. It was “Middlemarch,” her favorite novel; but though he tried to share her appreciation of it, he found himself dozing, and soon fell soundly asleep, the book in his hand.

CHAPTER XIII

HOW THE TREASURE GREW

DAY by dreamy day, in that soft-aired summer time, while the sea lay calm and blue about them and the low island breakers chanted their endless circle of song; day by day, while the sun stabbed down upon the awnings or sank into the purple glory of the evening sea, the white yacht lay-to in the little bay and swung to her anchor-chain in the shifting tides that crept slowly up over the white beach, or left it lying wet and dark in long, wide reaches over which the sea birds squawked and shrilled in their flighty circuits; and night after night the boats went out and the divers went down and came up, and the shell piles grew upon the shore.

For, despite the gloomy foreshadowings of the Swedes, they had prodigious success on the banks in Half-Moon Bay, and seemed in a fair way to fulfill the dreams of the Thrales. Test washes made from time to time disclosed the fact that the virgin levels they had been working upon were unusually productive of rich gems. As a result of the tests, Mrs. Thrale had a score of large and beautiful pearls, of perfect shape, wrapped in a

piece of tissue paper which Tevis saw her take out and unfold now and again with eyes full of satisfaction.

"You know they say," he heard her tell Hazel while he was repairing an electrolier in the saloon, "that pearls are often worth more than diamonds. I've seen some no bigger than these two here, that brought twenty thousand apiece."

"Those large pearls are certainly very beautiful," said Hazel. "A necklace made of them would be priceless!"

Mrs. Thrale wrapped her jewels up carefully in the tissue paper, and put them in a little buckskin bag. "Wait till I get this full," said she, with a smile of cupidity. "Then I guess we won't have to work any more."

"Do you think people are any happier if they don't work?" asked Hazel.

"You ought to know," replied Mrs. Thrale, with a meaning look.

"Yes," sighed the girl. "I have led an idle life, though I still mean to do something. The trouble is there isn't much that girls in my position can do. But a man can work. See how busy Mr. Tevis is."

"Mr. Tevis doesn't hurt himself by hard labor on this trip," said he, laughing. "Everything is running smoothly now." As he looked at her he was conscious of an effort to keep his fondness for her out of his eyes.

"Yes; but you are responsible for something,"

said she, as Mrs. Thrale took her treasures to her room. "I'd give anything for a little responsibility."

"Maybe Mrs. Thrale would let you take care of her pearls." He smiled after the retreating figure with the buckskin bag. "A lady purser would be just the thing on a steamer like this."

"Yes; but Mrs. Thrale is purser herself," said she. "Is that the anchor coming up? It sounds like it. Well, I'm glad to be moving even if it's only around to the next cove."

"Yes, it's the anchor," he replied. "We've fished them all out of here. I heard the Captain say we'd be moving along before night."

"I'm glad to get away from Half-Moon Bay," she said after a moment. "I mean the sailors' omens—their superstitious fears of something terrible impending here. They have made me uncomfortable. And then out at the lower point—your anxiety to get me back to the boats before something happened."

"Surely you couldn't have guessed there was anything unusual in my mind." He looked at her questioningly.

"Oh, no," she laughed. "Didn't you observe how readily I fell in with your idea of the race? I was racing away from your bugaboo, whatever it was."

"So you saw through my scheme and yet said nothing?" he remarked, smiling. "Well, it's hard

to get ahead of a girl of to-day, even in a foot-race. But did you see anything on the beach?"

"Yes; I saw the careful way you were concealing something from me. What was it?"

"I really couldn't say what it was myself," he said. "It was nothing to be much afraid of, I fancy."

"More duplicity," she laughed. "Well, I'm used to it in men."

"And not in women?"

"I didn't mention women," she said lightly. "They, of course, come in for some of it. But one can't read them as one can men. I think I can tell when a man is fibbing. They're all so unconsciously frank with women."

"I suppose that, from a woman's fine standpoint, men *are* bungling creatures," said he. "But can you read what a man thinks of you—how deeply he cares for you!"

"Oh, when it comes to such matters," she said with an effort at gayness which was less a failure than his own, "I confess I am in the dark. I've never been schooled in affairs of the heart."

"But you must have seen that every man aboard this yacht is in love with you."

"How ridiculous!" said she, laughing.

"It would be ridiculous if they were not."

"You don't mean that," she said with fine gravity though evidently not much displeased.

"I do, too," he insisted, in further proof of

man's capacity for bungling. "How can they help it?"

Her blush deepened.

"Oh, here's Port!" she said as the white cat entered the room, as if to afford her the needed diversion. She picked up the fuzzy animal and nestled it close to her cheek. "I thought it was the strangest sight I ever saw on shipboard—Mrs. Thrale sitting in her old rocking chair, the one she brought from the schooner, with this cat in her lap and her feet on a braided rug, rocking back and forth and singing 'Shall We Gather at the River?' "

"She's unique, isn't she?" said Tevis. He twisted the last bulb into the electrolier and went on deck, followed by the girl.

"Why," she cried, "we're under sail! Isn't the yacht pretty, with her canvas all set?"

"She is that," said Captain Thrale, coming around to their side of the house. "Seems like I was aboard the old schooner again. She takes the wind pretty fair, and it saves coal."

"What about the shells we're leaving behind?" asked Tevis, his phantom Mongol looming up again. "Are they safe there, Captain?"

"Oh, yes; safe enough," was the confident reply, "though Mrs. Thrale hated to leave 'em, even for so short a time. You see," he said in his most confidential tone, "if they wash out like the tests we've made, there's easily thirty thousand dollars' worth of pearls there."

Tevis' quick mental arithmetic gave him his share as fifteen hundred dollars, more money than he had had at one time since his father's failure.

"Yes," said he, taking a sudden interest in the leaving behind of the pearls, "it's no wonder Mrs. Thrale is anxious. Are they being guarded?"

"Oh, yes," said the Captain. "I left two well-armed men back there on guard, Ole Ek and Lars Larsen. They're good safe men."

"Well, I don't know," remarked Tevis. "I don't like that plan of leaving treasure behind there for the first beach-combers that come along to make off with."

"But they weren't rotted enough," declared Thrale. "And we'll be back to Half-Moon before long. They're safe there with Ole and Lars."

Tevis walked aft with Hazel who had been standing aside. As they looked astern after the yacht had rounded the first point they could see upon the cliff the rough outline of a forehead, nose and chin, which the sailors called "Grandma's Face."

"It looks like Mrs. Thrale's profile," said Hazel quietly to Tevis. "See that nose and that brow."

"There is a resemblance," affirmed Tevis, "but the artist hasn't flattered her."

They sailed slowly along within easy hailing distance of the arid island. About three miles to the north of Grandma's Face they rounded a low breezy headland, and there, in an open bay, to their great surprise, lay the junks, with their small

boats flocking about them, full of Chinese. The yacht ran close in before those aboard her were aware of the presence of the junk or the Chinamen could note the coming of the vessel. Gongs were booming out from the boats, while a long succession of vocal minor notes rang out over the water, sounding like an incantation.

“That’s for sharks,” said the Captain. “Guess they’ve got no diving suits, for there comes a fellow up out of the water, with none on.”

“And there’s another!” cried Flamel. “It’s all old-fashioned diving. Don’t see a single helmet among ’em.”

“Then they can’t be On Yick men!” declared the Captain of a sudden. “I thought it was kind of funny, for they told me On Yick began the season away up to Angel de la Guarda, and worked down here in the fall. That’s what I was counting on when I struck Espiritu. And I thought On Yick had better boats, too.”

“See ’em scramble in!” piped Mrs. Thrale. “They’re pulling back to the junks.” She put her glass to her eyes. “They’re scared of us. I see one of ’em running around with a gun—the ugly heathen!”

“I’ll tell you what they are,” cried the Captain. “They’re poachers! That’s what they are. I might a-known it before.”

“Poachers!” repeated Mrs. Thrale. “Well, I should think if they could work in the daytime, we could, too. You always was too cautious, Jim.”

“How do you know but we’ll work by daylight after a while, when we get up north?” retorted Thrale. “We’re down here now, right in the track of the La Paz boats. We can’t——”

“They’re getting up sail,” broke in Mrs. Thrale. “Land sakes! What funny sailors! See ’em pulling on that sheet and all falling over each other.”

Up went the great lug-sail of the nearest junk, which tacked away to leeward of the yacht, and then pointed her high bow straight out to sea. The others quickly followed.

“Wonder where they’re going!” said Mrs. Thrale, her hawk-eyes staring after them. “We scared ’em out all right.”

“They probably take us for a Mexican cruiser.” Thrale smiled. He was the kind of man who, being easily frightened himself, most appreciates creating panic in others. “This looks like a mighty good place for pearls. Not very sheltered, but clear of rocks. Guess here’s where we anchor, and if they come back, we’ll run up the Mexican flag and scare the barnacles off ’em.”

“Aw!” drawled Sir Charles, “another of those nasty, boresome waits; no doubt it will be as bad as Half-Moon Bay; and there’s nobody aboard that plays bridge. Gad, if Dumble and Braisted and Phelps were only here! By Jove! This does beat the Dutch for a stupid cruise!”

He and Hazel engaged in a lifeless colloquy in their steamer chairs for a half hour, and then he went below, leaving her alone on deck.

When he appeared at the dinner table a few hours later, he was very red-faced and as loquacious as a village spinster. Thrale, who had been going in and out of the baronet's stateroom, was also given to light remarks on everything going. Some of Sir Charles' stories at dessert time were rather broad, and Tevis had to keep up a running fire of talk on his side to drown out his reckless speech. This angered Walden, and they came to words, in the midst of which Hazel left the table. To smooth matters over, Thrale began to tell a story on his own account—a pointless tale at the close of which he laughed loudly. But Mrs. Thrale did not laugh. She sat with her sharp elbows on the cloth and her hands under her boney cheeks, looking closely at her husband across the board. It was a strange scrutiny. At the end of another of his inane yarns, at which he laughed more immoderately than before, she observed in tones as hard as a xylophone's:

“Captain Thrale, if I hadn't with my own hands thrown the last bottle of that devil's stuff into the sea, I'd say you'd been drinking. As for the lord, I can't tell it on him. But what makes you so silly? I s'pose it's because you're so glad them Chinamen got out of this cove, without bothering us. I wish, Jim, you wouldn't go to pieces over nothing.”

After dinner Tevis saw Hazel sitting aft, looking moodily toward the dull shore, and up to the central peaks, purpled by the sinking sun. He

knew that she was dejected because of the scene at table, and he wanted to go over to her and cheer her, but he felt the delicacy of her position and desisted for a while. When finally, he made bold to approach her, she fled before him into the saloon and to her own room.

He could cheerfully have gone to Sir Charles and choked him into insensibility for having so wounded her susceptible sense, but he bided his time. Beside, he argued bitterly, who should espouse the cause of a woman against her affianced husband?

“And yet the brute has no right!” he kept saying over and over. “It’s only the man who protects her from insult—who really loves her—that can claim that right.”

This self-persuasion was easy. What was not easy was to put aside the barrier which separated him from Hazel Braisted, and that barrier was Walden. It was he who made his love a mocking futility. Yet he knew that he would go on loving her to the end of the chapter.

The first night’s work in the new cove proved very successful. Indeed, the number of shells gathered between twilight and dawn was greater than that of any other night’s haul they had made. The fresh shells were taken aboard for the present.

“I guess you can stand the smell of ’em for a while,” he said to Sir Charles. “It’s no worse than some of that cheese Braisted left aboard.”

“That Roquefort? Oh, but that’s different,

don't you know," said Walden. "It's prime stuff. But I suppose when we go to sea with you old pirates we have to bear almost anything."

He said this with a jocular air. Ever since the affair of the bottles there had been a sort of camaraderie between him and Thrale. Tevis suspected that they were enjoying many a glass together behind locked doors.

They went on gathering shells and stowing them aboard, with the intention of taking them back to their old treasure pile as soon as the bank should be stripped by the divers. Once or twice they saw smoke on the seaward horizon, evidently from passing steamers, but they did not come near the yacht.

One clear bright afternoon about a fortnight after they began work in the Chinamen's cove, Thrale, who was constantly poking about the skyline with his glass, made out three strange sails to the southeast, and a little later he declared that they were the junks coming back. For an hour or so all on board were on the alert, but the junks veered off to the westward and then the long headland to the south obscured them. All that afternoon the Captain kept nervously pointing his glass to the south and from time to time he shook his fuzzy head. He kept talking excitedly to Mrs. Thrale, who replied after her own peculiar fashion.

In the morning after the last boat had come in with its load, Tevis saw the Captain talking

earnestly with Flamel, and soon afterward the first officer came over to him and said:

"I'm going down with Pederson and Svenson to the shell pile. Old man's getting anxious about it. Guess his wife has been prodding him up, she's been so worried herself. Want to go along, Tevis? Going to take the launch. You'd come in handy if her sparker got out of whack."

"Count me in," said Tevis, glad of a change from the night-work below decks, and not minding the loss of a forenoon's sleep. He and Flamel made a hasty breakfast of coffee and rolls, and then stowed some rifles aboard the launch, together with a water cask; but the Swedes ate a hearty meal and spent an unconscionably long time at it, so that the last stroke of eight bells was sounding as Tevis turned the crank over in the trimmest little launch he had ever smelled gasoline in. They took the Captain's gig in tow.

Hazel was on deck to wave them a good-bye.

"A dandy girl—that's what she is!" remarked Flamel to Tevis as he returned the salute. "Here, Tevis, have a weed. They're pretty dry, but they smoke well."

"Thank you." Tevis **took** a cigar and lighted it from the match he offered. "And now maybe you don't mind telling me what we're going down to Half-Moon Bay for, and why we have brought along the arsenal?"

"It's the old woman's idea," he replied. "She's awfully cautious, you know, and she's got it into

her nut that there may have been trouble down there for Ole and Lars. It's the junks you know. I think myself it was a fool trick to leave that shell behind. Ole and Lars couldn't make much of a stand against a lot of hatchetmen like that."

"Ay dank maybe is so," said Pederson, shaking his Viking head, while his white brows closed over his blue eyes. "Ay bin hear dem echoen what you call, Master Tevis. Anoder dimes Ay bin hear dem. Ay dank it vas someting—it was someting."

The other Swede moved his chin affirmatively.

"Look here, Pederson, Svenson, don't cross the dead line till you come to it. Here, smoke up and be cheerful." Flamel handed them each a cigar which they took and lighted solemnly. "And don't throw the matches into the boat. When there's gasoline aboard you can't be too careful."

The launch flew over the low waves, tipped with lucent gleams from the morning sun. They rounded point after point, running close inshore to get the good of the return eddies, for the tide was against them.

"There you are," said Flamel, as they swung out of the last eddy and steered seaward to clear a kelp patch. "There's Grandma's Face. We're making it in less than an hour, and will be back by ten and turn in for our morning snooze. Gee! I'm sleepy enough!" He yawned prodigiously, and then half-closed his eyes. But in another moment he was alive and subtly alert, with every sense astir. For just as the launch turned the little cape

below Grandma's Face, the outermost northern point above Half-Moon Bay, Pederson called out from the bow:

“Lookadare—lookady Cheenamans! All going by der shell-pile. Ay yoost bin dinken ve see um and now dey dare all right.”

“Easy there!” cried Flamel softly. “Put on your muffler, Tevis! Boys, don’t make any noise! Run her in behind that high rock. We’ll make a sneak on ’em if we can. Straight in behind the rock!”

PART II.

ALARUMS AND EXCURSIONS

CHAPTER XIV

THE HATCHETMEN

As THE swell was light they were able to approach the high rock islet to which Flamel pointed, but the strong tide threatened to carry them out into view of the Chinamen again. So they turned and ran the launch back behind the Face and up to the first cove north—a tiny affair, well sheltered and secure. They anchored and went ashore in the gig with their rifles, leaving Swenson in charge of the boat. A strip of gravel beach led back to the point below the Face, and there they skirted the shore, their rifles in their hands, to a place where they could spy upon the invaders. Flamel peered past the rocky wall:

“They’re at it, all right,” said he. “The high-binders! They’ve washed out nearly all of ’em. It’s a lot of sport to stand here and see your share of thirty thousand dollars’ worth of pearls gobbled up that way, ain’t it?”

Tevis looked over his shoulder and along the curve of the beach to the nook in the rocks where the pearl shells had been cached. Thirty or more repulsive-looking Mongols were washing out the

shells in pools of sea water which stood in holes they had dug in the sand near the lower end of the beach. They were working rapidly and had evidently taken out nearly all of the pearls. Some of the shells were being carried in sacks along the beach towards their boats. Half a mile away, down, near the southern end of the cove, the three junks bobbed on the gentle waves.

"Yes, it is pleasant," said Tevis, thinking of his fifteen hundred dollars. "The pirates!"

"What's become of Ole and Lars?" said Flamel. "Wonder if they hiked out when the Chinks landed."

"No!" Pederson was shaking his head and making doleful sounds in his throat. "Dey bin dead—dey vas dead mans now for dot. Ole Ek vas dead and Lars Larsen vas dead. Dey yoost bin dead all right."

"I shouldn't wonder but what he's right, Tevis." Flamel was staring hard and pointing into some cactus clumps near the shell pile. "See those two dark things lying there, sort of twisted up. Can you make 'em out?"

"Yes; they're dead right enough," said Tevis very gravely. "Poor Ole! He didn't like the cove—none of the Swedes liked it."

"No, no! It vas dose dead man's songs vot Ay bin hearen—dose echoen vot you call!" wailed Pederson. "An' now you see Ay bin tellen true for dot. Ah, Ole Ek vas my bruddern as leekady vas. And day stealen all our parl! And Ole and

Lars don't get no shares. Ay dank I kill some Cheenamans yoost now—dot's vot Ay dank."

Red-eyed he was and resolute. He raised his rifle, but Flamel pulled it down.

"It would be a lot of fun to send a few shots in there," said he, "and see 'em scatter. But, Pederson, we can't do it. They're too many for us. They might come down here and shoot us up and chop us all to pieces with their hatchets." He turned to speak to Tevis.

Wha-r-r! Pederson's rifle barked so briskly, right in their ears, as to confound them for an instant.

"Here, you silly Swede—what the devil have you done?" Flamel glared at Pederson.

"Ay dank I yoost got one!" cried Pederson. "See him yump!"

One of the Mongols danced in the air and plumped down upon the sands. The others looked up from their work, affrighted, and some of them pointed wildly in the direction of the white men, while three who were armed with rifles and who were evidently acting as guards, raised their weapons and aimed at Pederson, who was exposing himself excitedly and had to be dragged back behind the rocks.

"Now we're in for it!" said Flamel. "Keep your heads protected and aim low if they come. Here, you fool Swede! Stand back, or they'll plug you sure."

Pederson's rifle rung out again and he shook his shoulders in glee, as he cried:

"An under von Ay got—Ay got him all right. Dot's two for Ole and Lars. Now Ay get an under von, you see! Dey don'd steal my parl for nodding, Ay dank!"

Zip! zip! phwatt! The bullets flew past them or flattened against the rocks.

Flamel and Tevis answered the fire briskly, and Pederson pumped lead like mad.

It was a hot fusillade on either side, but it worked no great injury, for those of the Chinamen who did not have rifles planked themselves down behind the shell pile while the others sought shelter among the rocks. After a time the fire of the junk men became fitful. They must have seen that they were wasting their cartridges. Soon they ceased firing.

"There they go!" Flamel lowered his rifle. "They're off for the boats—and they're taking their dead Chinks with 'em."

"Yes and the parl!" groaned Pederson, "and Ay got hundred-dollar share in dot."

They ran out from behind the point to some low rocks near the shell-pile and dropping down behind it—fired again and again, while the scurrying coolies made off to the junks. Soon the lug-sails were slatting under the fresh moving breeze and the ugly craft sailed away.

"Gone!" groaned Flamel. "Why couldn't we have headed 'em off some way?"

"Gone!" repeated Tevis, "and taken the loot with them."

"Yes, dey vasn't fifty pound of shell left mit-outen vashen. And my hundred dollar all gone!" Pederson was in a delirium of rage. Rushing down to the water's edge he emptied his rifle again and again at long range at the disappearing junks.

"And we couldn't do a thing chasing 'em in the launch," despaired Flamel. "There's so many of 'em."

"Yo-eee! Yo-eee!" the Chinamen yelled back, grimacing, taunting, triumphant, for they had despoiled the Egyptians and had secured as much in this one haul as they would have made in a year's diving. Tide and wind favored them and they were soon well down the bay, though Pederson, still lamenting his losses in blood and treasure, sent shot after shot over the water in the wake of the high stern of the last junk.

Flamel and Tevis gazed hopelessly at the washed-out shells scattered about the sands. Wherever they stepped their feet crunched them and the sound was an empty, mocking one to the two men as they thought of their shares in the stolen treasure.

"Gee!" cried Flamel, "this will break Mrs. Thrale's heart! I wish I'd stayed here with the guards. Of course they surprised them. Where was it we saw those things?"

"Over there in the cactus clumps," said Tevis.

striding forward and coming suddenly upon the bodies of Ole and Lars.

"Poor chaps!" cried Flamel, going over to him. "Hey there, Pederson!" he shouted. "Stop your fool firing and blubbering about your lost hundred dollars and come up here."

Pederson turned, like one distraught, turned again, fired one more shot and then strode up to Flamel muttering. When he saw the hatchet-marked bodies of his compatriots he was full of grief and stood helplessly staring. It was not until Flamel found some shovels that had been left by the Chinamen in their haste, and put one of them into his hands that he came out of his trance-like state.

Then he set to work fiercely with the shovel, heaving, gasping and sweating, and, with the help of Tevis and Flamel, soon buried the bodies of the two men and piled stones over their grave to keep off the coyotes.

"Now," said Flamel when they rested for a moment in the scant shade of a mesquit, "if I was boss I'd take the launch and go after those robbers and see where they hold out. They must have a regular camp not far from here—probably on this very island of Espiritu. If we could locate 'em we could rally a lot of our crew, run over there, surprise 'em, hold 'em up and get back the goods."

"Wouldn't night be the best time for that?" asked Tevis.

"Yes. Tell you what you do, Tevis—you take

the launch and run back to the yacht, and report to the old man. Pederson and I will stay here. And there's Swenson—send him over here from the boat. We'll need him if those chaps should happen to come back."

"All right!" Tevis started away, calling back over his shoulder: "Don't you wish you had the pleasure of reporting this to Mrs. Thrale?"

"Lord help you!" was the reply.

On the way back to the boat the vision of his pig-tail phantom recurred to Tevis, and he blamed himself for not crediting his senses with its reality. He saw now that he should have reported to Captain Thrale what he had seen and not have dismissed the matter so lightly.

All the speed that was in the launch—and she was good for ten knots—he got out of her on that flying run back to the yacht.

"Merciful me!" gasped Mrs. Thrale when he reported the news to the Captain who stared at him helplessly out of the cabin window and blinked several times before he could utter a word. "Jim Thrale, didn't I tell you? Now, see what you've done! All that long, hard work for nothing! I knew they'd do it—I told you so, but you would stick to it that them two crazy Swedes could take care of it. Wasn't rotted enough! Well, they were rotted enough for the Chinamen to wash out. Why couldn't *we* have done it! I'd like to know! And now they're all gone. Thirty thousand dollars' worth at least and maybe a lot more!"

"It's not all gone," snuffed the Captain crushed under the weight of his good woman's words. "There's the shell."

"Yes, there's the shell!" she snapped contemptuously. "What's it worth? Three or four thousand dollars at the most. And we've lost thirty."

"Mr. Flamel suggests," said Tevis to the Captain, impatient because of the delay, "that we get right after them. If you'll steam back to Half-Moon——"

"Yes, yes!" clipped out the Captain. "Yes, we'll do that. Up anchor there!" He turned to the pipe and whistled down to the engineer. "Get ready to start her up, Mac! Full steam!"

"Of course we've got to get after 'em," said Mrs. Thrale. "We can do it—we can make 'em yield up; that is, if we can find 'em. But they may sneak out of our way in some hidden cove or other. It's a shame—a mean, nasty shame—that's what it is, and I say so."

She said much else while the *Searcher* was getting under way, and what she said made Tevis feel sorry for the unlucky Captain who all along had thought he had taken ample precaution for the protection of the pearls.

When the word passed about the yacht that the treasure had been looted by the Chinamen, the petty officers and the crew, highly wrought up because of the loss of their "lays" also had harsh criticisms to pronounce upon the Captain, and though this was done in quiet, the master of the

yacht could see by their dark looks and their indifferent attention to orders that they were all incensed against him. He went about sighing for a while and then locked himself up in his cabin, while the yacht speeded south.

"It's too bad," said Hazel when Tevis told her the story of the looted shell-pile as she sat on the after deck in a big easy chair where she had been talking with Sir Charles. "Those Chinamen were real pirates after all. They certainly looked their parts."

"What do we care?" Walden raised his shoulders disdainfully and looked down the deck through his monocle. "Serves 'em jolly well right. You know what I think of 'em."

"And you lose your share, too, Mr. Tevis?" Hazel's full gaze was sympathetic.

"Yes, I lose my share," he said in as careless a tone as he could assume, though the loss had been as real to him as to anyone aboard save Mrs. Thrale. "But it was only a little matter of fifteen hundred dollars, that is if the tests held good."

"Poor Captain Thrale!" she said. "No doubt he's had his hauling-over by this time."

"I wish he'd get angry and chuck that old cormorant overboard," remarked Sir Charles.

"Oh, no," said Hazel smiling. "We couldn't get along without Mrs. Thrale. She's a source of infinite delight. Well," she added meditatively, "I suppose this will delay us still further. There'll be more pearls to gather to make up for the miss-

ing ones." She sighed. "If only I could get a wireless or something from father, I wouldn't care so much."

Tevie did not tell her of the plan of pursuit and recapture which might mean less delay than she feared.

Mrs. Thrale stood on the bridge with the Captain when they steamed into Half-Moon Bay and Flamel from the beach waved his cap to them. The sea hawk fluttered wildly up and down the little railed platform, scanning the shore for signs of the devastation. She was one of the first to get into the Captain's boat after the anchor was dropped. When, with flapping skirts, she sprang ashore, she dashed straight to the shell-pile, getting there ahead of the men. She gave one glance at the empty, scattered shells and called back to the Captain:

"Lord a-mercy! See what they done! They've washed out nearly all of 'em and packed off the rest unwashed. If that ain't what I call the meanest, lowest-down kind of sneak-thieving! Nearly all we got out of this cove is stole, robbed, gone! Sakes alive! Wouldn't I like to been here and caught 'em at it. They wouldn't have got a shell."

"It's too bad, Emily," sniffed her husband. "It's too tarnation bad, but we've got about fifty ton of empty shell here, and at one hundred and twenty-five a ton, that's over six thousand dollars."

"Six thousand dollars!" snapped Mrs. Thrale.

"Why, them pearls was worth five times as much as that, the way they tested up. I wouldn't be so easy satisfied with a crackly lot of old empty shell that you'll have to go clear down to Acapulco to get rid of. Now, we'll have to sail right after them highbinders and get them pearls back."

"I thought we'd get that shell aboard first," said the Captain, "or another gang will come along and we'll lose it all."

"Captain," said Flamel. "I've got a scheme. It's for Tevis and me to take the launch and run down the coast after the Chinks and locate their camp. It's on this island somewhere. They won't go a mile from land and we can follow the coast and pick 'em up all right."

"Then what?" said the Captain, showing a pleased interest in Flamel's plan.

"I suppose," he said deferentially, "that if we find 'em you'll be wanting to steam down and hold 'em up and get back the boat. We can surprise 'em in camp to-night."

"Yes; I guess, we'll have to do that," assented the Captain.

"Of course we will," said his helpmeet.

"And it won't take so very many men," said Flamel. "I'll speak to Tevis—he'll want to go with me—and we'll get the launch ready right away."

"Heave ahead!" said the Captain. "Only I wish you'd order out all hands to get this shell aboard first."

Flamel smiled good-naturedly and summoned the crew to gather up the shells.

Sir Charles and Hazel had come ashore in one of the boats. Hazel looked with interest upon the shell-gathering operations. Tevis had just taken Walden aside and pointed out the low mounds amid the cactus scrubs where lay the bodies of Lars Larsen and Ole Ek.

"By jove!" ejaculated the baronet, his monocle dropping the length of its string. "This is a beastly mess to get into."

"Hullo!" said Tevis, "Mrs. Thrale has found a little pile of unwashed shells that the Chinamen didn't get."

Half-a-dozen men had come at the bidding of the sea hawk, who set them to work immediately to wash out the few bushels of shells that showed streaks of putrid animal matter within their gaping mouths. The men had gone at the washing with a will, using the coolies' water-holes and throwing the shells, as soon as washed, into sacks with the others that were being taken aboard the yacht.

"Look-a-here!" cried Mrs. Thrale to the Captain. "See how them shell was running." She exhibited her little kernels of treasure. "I tell you them beach-combers made a big haul out of us. Shouldn't wonder if it was twice thirty thousand. These few that's left are coming out big. Don't say anything about your old shell. One pearl like this is worth pretty near the whole lot of it." She

held up a beautiful round white jewel just handed to her by one of the washers.

At that moment Flamel came over to Tevis and took him aside.

"It's all settled," said he. "You are to go with me in the launch, scouting down shore for the Chinks. When we locate the camp we're to come back and report and then we'll steam down in the yacht and scoop 'em in. The men are crazy to get after them. You see, they're all out good money."

"I'm with you," said Tevis. "When do you start?"

"Soon as we can get ready," was the reply. "It's getting on toward evening, but there'll be a full moon to-night and that will help us. It's just to reconnoitre. There's no use getting the whole crew worked up over our cruise. We can give out that we're going to take a run down to La Paz for supplies."

Tevis and Flamel were preparing for their launch cruise aboard the yacht a little later when Sir Charles, sauntering along deck, overhead them. He waited while Flamel gave some orders in regard to a supply of "chow" and an extra case of gasoline. Then he approached Tevis quietly and said in low, eager tones.

"So you're going to La Paz in the little boat? That's what I heard the boatswain say. Now I tell you what you do. Be a good fellow and take Miss Braisted and me along. It's only a beastly little hole, La Paz, according to what I hear, but there's

steamers touching there twice a month and we could get back to San Diego from there."

"But we really don't know that we're going as far as La Paz," replied Tevis evasively. "It's a long way—more than eighty miles."

"Well, I'll make it an object for you to go there, then," said the baronet. "What do you say to two hundred pounds?"

"What do I say?" returned Tevis, smiling. "I don't say a word. I'm not master of this ship, and what's more, I don't mind telling you in confidence that it's not La Paz that we're after. We're going to chase the Chinamen to their camp, wherever that is. You can go along, Sir Charles."

"No, no; thanks awfully!" said Walden. "But I wish you luck."

"Come on, old chap!" cried Flamel to Tevis. "Everything's ready."

"Wait a minute! I've got to see Jim Reynolds and tell him what to do about the generators." Tevis went below. When he returned to the deck Flamel was over the side, sitting in the launch, stowing the guns and the chow.

"Mr. Tevis!"

He started at the unexpected sound of Hazel's voice. There she stood in the twilight by the gangway looking at him anxiously out of her dark eyes.

"Yes, Miss Braisted!"

"Sir Charles says you're going out with Mr. Flamel to hunt down the junk men who stole the pearls."

"Well," he said, "that isn't exactly——"

"Please don't try to make out that it's something else," she said gravely. "That's what you're going out for, isn't it? And it's an awfully dangerous thing to do. Those hatchetmen are such dreadful creatures. Now you must promise me something."

"What shall I promise?" he asked expectantly.

"That you'll take good care of yourself—the very best of care—and not run any unnecessary risk."

"Yes," he said with a tremor of tenderness in his tone and looking straight into her serious eyes, "I'll be careful for—for *your* sake."

"That's good," she said flushing a little. "And you'll not forget, will you?"

"I'll remember," he said with a gladness of heart she could not have failed to note. "Good-bye!"

She held out her hand and he gave it a gentle, lingering pressure.

"Good-bye! Don't forget."

He went down the steps and aboard the launch. He fussed a little with the engine, which sputtered and whirred, and the boat started gently.

"*Adios!*" he called back to her as he stood up in the stern and waved his hand.

"*Adios!*" she replied with an answering wave.

Flamel twisted the little wheel, the launch made a short turn, spreading a long ripple of water from its bow, and darted out into the deepening night.

CHAPTER XV

THE CAMP OF THE PIRATES

ALL the liquid glory of the gulf was outspread for them as they glided out of the little bay and down the long, glittering moonpath, steering due south. From the great arch above them the pensile stars trembled in their southern largeness and lustre and dipped down to the sea on every side save where the sombre silhouette of the island ridges rose to the east, while the distant but pervasive roar of the surf from miles of reef and beach crooned lullabies to sleep-fasting senses that must still deny sleep.

"Great, isn't it?" said Flamel through the spell that had been cast over Tevis.

"It's more than great," he replied. "It's divine!"

Never such a night! Never, though so greatly in need of sleep, was Tevis so much awake. For the visible beauty of the watery world and of the moonlit, star-strewn sky, together with the adventure afoot, filled him with an ardor of life, with a greedy lust of the senses for the poetry that is more to man than his workaday nature ever admits. So while the launch swung down the long

liquid swells and up to the summits of the gleaming wave-tips he was full of the glamor of the Homeric deep and wove out a little Odyssey of his own in which he was Ulysses and Hazel was Penelope, only that his Penelope voyaged with him and was not left at home to be harassed by suitors.

They rounded point after point, the engine throbbing rythmatically, though with an occasional irregular break that evidenced the nature of her running power. As each cove and inlet opened to them they made a careful shoreward scrutiny, but saw no signs of the junks.

"Mighty glad we haven't got that grouchy 'lord' of Mrs. Thrale's along with us," said Flamel, taking his cigarette from his mouth. "Just for a lark I invited him to come, but of course he wouldn't do it when he found out what we were up to. He wasn't looking for a brush with the Chinks. He's not like some venturesome Englishmen I've known—they'd have been crazy to go out on a trip like this. The girl seemed impressed with the idea we'd get into a mix-up, didn't she? You needn't make that mumbling in your throat. I caught what she said—making you promise you'd keep out of danger and all that. Say, old man," he added in a half-bantering tone, "do you know I think if she had 'the lord' off her hands, you could run up alongside all right."

"Oh, cut it out!" growled Tevis. "Don't make sport of her."

“Sport nothing!” Flamel changed his tone to one of more seriousness. “You must be out in a mighty thick fog if you can’t see what that girl means when she’s so anxious to tell you to take good care of yourself. She didn’t tell *me* that—she wasn’t worrying about me.”

There was a wistful note in his voice which made Tevis feel that here, too, might be a love tragedy. He had often seen Flamel look very approvingly at Hazel when she walked the deck, but it all seemed a part of the general adoration of her and not of any special significance. Although he made a swift change of the subject, harking back to Mrs. Thrale and the shell-pile, the echo of Flamel’s heartening words remained. If a man whom he suspected to be in love with her himself, could place such a devoted construction upon Hazel’s parting admonition, why should he not so construe it? Why should he not——

“Look there!” cried Flamel suddenly. “Isn’t that a sail over to starboard? And there’s another.”

They were just rounding a long reef-line over which the surf was pounding noisily and breaking white in the moonlight.

“Yes,” declared Tevis; “it’s the junks!”

“Better slow down!” cautioned the first officer. “We don’t want to run up too close to them yet. They’re sailing down the island. Must have had light winds or they’d be farther along than this.

Tevis slackened the speed of the engine and

looking forward over the long stretch of water, saw that the junks were moving slowly shoreward under the evening breeze.

"Guess we'd better keep out a little and follow along like a fly cop on the other side of the street," said Flamel. "They smell better to leeward anyway, and we're so low in the water, I don't believe they'll pick us up."

So, like the detective on the other side of the street, they followed the junks, changing their course as they drew nearer, keeping landward with an occasional headland between them and the strange craft they were spying upon. Sometimes in the shoreward shadows they came so near the junks that they could hear the droning voices aboard them.

"We could send a shot aboard that fellow, if we wanted to," said Flamel, indicating the nearest of the lug-sails. "Good thing Pederson isn't here. He'd raise a hullabaloo. Guess we'd better lay-to till they make that point, or they'll catch on to us. Gee, ain't that a fragrant perfume? What do you call it—rose water or heliotrope?"

"More like Butchertown at low tide," replied Tevis, slowing the engine.

"And get on to the tin-cantations! Weird enough for you, eh?"

There was a sound of banging gongs, a shrieking fiddle and a high-strung Mongol voice, wailing out in a distressful minor, through the still night:

"Beats the 'Miserere' by a mile, don't it?" re-

marked Flamel. "I'd like to give that heathen Caruso something to torture the air for. That's right—stop her. If ever they hear our put-put it will be all off."

A little later they were following slowly along behind the junks, the "music" sounding more faintly and the smells lost in the night wind. Of a sudden the lug-sails disappeared behind an unsuspected point of land.

"What's this?" cried Flamel. "A hidden cove? I don't know whether we ought to go in or not. They might turn their guns loose from some ambush or other."

"Then you think there's more of them ashore!" Tevis peered forward as they neared the obscure point and the cove opened a little to them.

"That's what? If it isn't their camp I'm no good at guessing. I'll bet they've got a big shell pile in there somewhere and a lot of loot of all kinds. See their fires?"

The launch had slowly poked her nose beyond the abrupt little headland. There they could see two or three camp fire twinkling on the beach and a dozen men running down to the water's edge to meet the boats from the incoming junks. The mouth of the cove was narrow, but the inland water broadened into a quarter-mile stretch, which lay darkly before the launch in the shadow of high cliffs that ran out from the east.

"Pretty snug, isn't it?" said Flamel. "They've found here a tight little lagoon, well guarded by

that outside reef and those cliffs you see over there, and no doubt so shallow that nothing but their horse-troughs can sail into it. The only way we could get in to hold 'em up and get back our pearls would be in small boats, and it would be pretty risky. It's a mighty safe little camp, don't you think?"

"Well," replied Tevis, "it may be safe from On Yick and it may be safe from Mexican gun-boats, but it isn't safe from Mrs. Thrale."

Flamel laughed. "I know what you mean. She'll have that loot back from those highbinders if she has to clean out the whole camp herself. Wonder if we can't get a closer view of 'em. Let's see. If we went right in, they'd hear the engine and catch on to us. Let's run her back to that first little cove above the reef, go ashore and sneak along the beach under the cliff—it's pretty well in the shadow there—and take a squint at the pagans."

He turned the launch about and they made for the small cove. Anchoring and going ashore in the gig they stole quietly along the beach at the foot of the cliff until they reached a tangle of mesquits and chaparral. Through the tall, veiling brush they worked their way around to the north side of the camp of the poachers and to a point not far from them.

Nearly all the men of the junks had come ashore, and they were now squatting about the fires, gabbling like geese and eating food from bowls with chop-sticks. A stout man, in a large blouse and

with a round cap on his head, was giving orders as to the bestowal of some luggage in sacks that had just been brought ashore. A little way back from the beach amid the scattered mesquits were two or three small bowers and a long white reach of piled-up "shell."

Flamel and Tevis sat in the brush, their rifles in their hands, noting all the movements of the poachers. Once when the stout man took a few steps toward them and paused as if listening, Flamel raised his rifle, but the man, all unconscious of their presence, went back to the nearest fire.

"That's the boss—that fat chap in the round cap," whispered Flamel; "bet a dollar he's a red-button man and rules this gang like a king. We could give him a surprise, couldn't we? He hardly expected us in to rice this way. No doubt but what he's got the stolen pearls on him somewhere or close by. If we could only separate him from the gang we could get the goods back to the yacht without any help. But he sticks close to camp. See that boatload just come ashore! They've nearly all got hatchets and there's three rifles."

Tevis looked to where the moonlight gleamed upon the rifle-barrels.

"How many are there in the gang," he asked. "I've been counting, and I make it about forty."

Flamel made a hasty count.

"That's about right. Of course they're pretty good fighters, but if we could run in here before morning with Pederson and a dozen other husky

Swedes and catch these gents asleep we could rout 'em out, hold 'em up and get the pearls back all right."

"That's a good plan," said Tevis. "Let's be at it."

They turned and crawled through the brush back to the beach and were soon aboard the launch again, speeding for the yacht. During the two-hour run they took turns at sleeping and when the yacht hove in sight each felt somewhat refreshed, though "a little fuzzy," as Flamel expressed it.

CHAPTER XVI

A CLASH AT ARMS

“WHAT luck?” demanded the sea hawk the moment the launch ran alongside with one of Flamel’s neat stopping turns.

“We located ’em all right. We found their camp. It’s about twenty miles below here, not far from the end of the island.”

“Did you see anything of——” began the Captain.

“How many of ’em are there?” came the eager demand from Mrs. Thrale, by which her husband’s query was overborne.

“They’re in a tight little cove, Captain,” replied Flamel, stepping upon the deck. “There’s not more than forty of ’em, and I think——”

“Forty!” cried the Captain in dismay. “As many as that?”

“Only forty?” Mrs. Thrale’s high-pitched voice more than made up in confidence for her husband’s lack of it. “Why, we could run right down there and clean ’em out and get them pearls back in no time.”

“Oh, but forty hatchetmen,” objected the Captain.

"Forty's nothing," sniffed the sea hawk contemptuously. "Why, we could beat 'em out and get the stuff back if it was a hundred. They have only a few rifles and we have plenty."

"If you'll permit me, Captain," said Tevis to the cowed and hawk-clawed Thrale, "Mr. Flamel and I have thought of a plan. It is to take down enough men in the launch to give the Chinamen a first-class surprise, hold them up and make them hand over the pearls."

"That's it," said Mrs. Thrale. "Surprise 'em—Make 'em yield up. But why not go down in the yacht?"

"Because," explained Tevis, "we couldn't run in to the lagoon with her—there's reefs and rocks and shoals—and we might as well start from here in the launch as anywhere."

"Our idea," said Flamel, "was not to lose any time, but to run right back to the camp with, say, a dozen men. We could get there before three o'clock with this tide."

Mrs. Thrale rubbed her bony hands together and looked expectantly at Flamel and Tevis.

"That'll be all right," said the Captain, with a show of authority. "Rouse up Pederson, Svenson, and a lot of the others—how many do you want—twelve?—and get 'em started right away. It's almost two bells. You ought to get back by sun-up, hadn't you?"

"Yes, easily," said the first officer.

"But twelve men against that whole gang!" said

the Captain. "Do you think that will be enough, Mr. Flamel? The Chinamen probably haven't many rifles, but they're mighty handy with their hatchets, you know."

"I don't intend to let them get a hack at us with their hatchets," said Flamel. "We can stand them off with the rifles at a hundred feet or so and make them yield up."

Flamel was ordered to call up the men and Tevis to take the rifles from the rack and distribute them. The two men started hastily in different directions.

"Mr. Tevis!" came the voice of Hazel Braisted from where she was sitting on a deck-stool beside the afterhouse.

His heart leaped gladly at the sound. She had been up and waiting his return after all! He stepped over to her in the half-darkness. She wore a long coat and had a soft, dark something over her head. She rose quickly when he came toward her.

"So you found them and are going out on a night attack?"

"Why," he said, looking at her fondly, where she stood in the shadow of the house, "I believe something of the sort is planned.

"But is it necessary that *you* should go? There was an appealing touch in the tone. "Those awful hatchetmen!" Captain Thrall has been telling me more about them. You won't go, will you?"

"Yes," he replied conclusively, "I must go.

And I'm in a dreadful hurry to prepare for the trip. It's late and you must go right down to your room and to bed, and let me carry out my orders."

"Well, I'll go," she consented unwillingly. "Only remember, you're to take good care of yourself—the very best care. Good-bye!"

She put forth her hand and his own closed upon it and held it in a lingering pressure.

"Good-bye!" he said. "It's worth a lot to me to know that you care a little—as much as this." His voice trembled, for the warm contact of her hand made his pulses leap. "Here comes Flamel. Good-bye!"

Flamel did not see her as she hurried around the corner of the house.

"Do you know," said the first officer when he came up, "I'd go into this hold-up game with a good deal more ginger if the old man would show a little nerve."

"Oh, well," said Tevis, "Mrs. Thrale ought to be inspiration enough for you."

"That's just it—the way she lays it over the Captain makes me tired. Put in plenty of extra cartridges, Tevis, and a six-shooter for each man beside the rifles. We'll have the pick of our men and I guess the Chinks won't make much of a stand."

But after the men and their arms were all aboard the launch and they were flying down along the island coast, Tevis heard Flamel and a young

quartermaster named Perkins, who had been taken along because of his known bravery, quietly discussing the prospects of the adventure, and the first officer now struck a different key.

"I hope the hold-up scheme will work all right," Flamel was saying. "Neither the old man nor Mrs. Thrale has any idea what it means to sneak into the camp of a lot of beastly hatchetmen and rout 'em out this way. Pleasant morning pastime, eh?"

"What the hell do we care?" was the quartermaster's reply. "Gimme a cigareet."

As Tevis manipulated the engine, seeing to it that the oil cups were full and the batteries working properly, his thoughts ran upon Hazel. It was a comfort to think of her sleeping peacefully in her cabin while he was out on this dubious excursion. The last sweet words she had spoken when she had said "Good-bye" still remained with him and the soft warm feel of her little hand.

Other parting words remained with him, too—those of Mrs. Thrale. He could see the beak and the eyes of the sea hawk, thrust eagerly over the rail as the launch chugged away, with its full load of armed men, and towing two small boats.

"Bring 'em all back," she had admonished them. "Don't leave a single pinhead to those heathens. They can't do much with their old hatchets against your guns. You can scare 'em to pieces."

About scaring them to pieces, Tevis, who knew

how desperately the tongs fought in California, was not so sure; but he liked the look of the launch-load of determined men, sitting in a double line with their knees almost touching each other and with their bristling rifles glinting in the moonlight. Particularly heartening to the whole crew was the voice of the ready-battling Pederson:

“Ve get a few Cheenamans dissen time, eh boys?” he was saying. “Ay dank ve yoost make oop for dot Half-Moon Bay bizness, eh, Svenson? Ve pay oop for Ole Ek und Lars Larsen all right. Dey don’d bin killen Svenskmen for noddings, Ay dank.”

“No, not for noddings,” grimly responded Svenson. “Ay make two Cheenamans go dead sure dis time all right.”

“Now Pederson,” cautioned Flamel, “don’t you go off half-cocked. We’ve got to surprise ’em—remember that. And if there’s any shooting done it’s only because it’s got to be done. Keep that in mind, all of you. We must catch ’em napping if we can.”

When at last they rounded the high cape which hid the hatchetmen’s cove from the seaward side, Flamel said:

“Now if you’ll shut off the engine, Tevis, we’ll bring the boats alongside and one of them can tow us up into the lagoon, in the shadow of the cliff there.”

The throb of the engine, which would have betrayed them to an alert guard on the beach, ceased

suddenly. One of the boats was pulled alongside and Pederson and Svenson got into it. They made fast to the bow of the launch, leaving the other boat astern, and, slowly and silently, the little flotilla moved over the quiet waters of the cove and past a gateway of rocks into the lagoon, towed by the small boat. There they saw the low-burning campfires on the beach.

When they were well in the middle of the lagoon they passed one of the junks, which lay motionless under the stars, with no sign of life aboard. The embers of the campfires ashore glowed a little plainer, and about them lay silent, bunchy shapes—the bundled-up hatchet-men, all soundly asleep. Not a sentry was in sight.

CHAPTER XVII

THE PURPLE BLOUSE

QUIETLY the anchor was let down in two fathoms and into the boat crawled the alert and expectant men, their rifles in hand and their Colts in their holsters. The three-o'clock-in-the-morning summons of drowsy nature had subdued the spirit of watchfulness in the camp—there was no one moving there.

As soon as the keels grated upon the beach the men stepped ashore, subtly alert for any movement in the camp of the hatchetmen. Leaving Jim Reynolds in charge of the boats, the other men, led by Flamel and Tevis, walked up the soft shingle as with padded feet, past the Chinamen's boats.

The human bundles beside the low-burning fires, were in little groups, as still as the rocks among which they lay. The bunched-up shapes looked darkly mysterious in the moonlight, and Tevis held his breath as he stared at them. How suddenly, at the sound of alarm, would these quiet bundles be quickened into active, threatening life!

It was a rare and unreal moment for him, for never before had he engaged in any sort of armed

warfare. The Swedes took it all as a matter of course, but to him the whole affair seemed phantasmal.

"Now, boys," said Flamel, in a commanding whisper when the invaders stopped for a moment at a sign from their chief, "when I give the word each of you fire one shot over their heads and yell as loud as you can."

The men, all eager to regain their treasure, looked vindictively at the robbers. To Tevis the Viking Swedes were living over again the histories of their predatory and vengeful forbears. As he looked into their tensely strained faces, showing ruggedly fierce in the moonlight, he saw that but one thought dominated them—the eager desire to regain their own and to punish the plundering Mongols. Moreover it occurred to him at that moment that the poachers must have other loot not stolen from the *Searcher's* crew, and that these reckless sons of the piratical Norsemen would not be too scrupulous about gathering in all the hoard.

As he saw the white-haired Swedes grasp their weapons he noted that among them were long-bladed, keen-pointed knives, showing that they were prepared for close fighting.

"Ready!" cried Flamel at the top of his voice. "Bang away!" He fired as he spoke and a dozen shots ripped forth, and while a fugue of echoes resounded from the cliffs, trebling the effect, the men yelled madly again and again. All had aimed high save Pederson and Svenson who, despite

Flamel's orders, had fired in among the dark forms about the campfires.

There was a wild uprush of the bundled coolies as though a cyclone had swept in among them, a screeching gabble of voices, high, frenzied and quickly changing from alarm to defiance. Hatchets and knives gleamed and clashed and a clamor of strange calls rent the early morning air and went echoing up the gulch. But there were two bundles that did not rise—those into which Pederson and Swenson had sent their whistling bullets.

Some of the frenzied Mongols sprang toward the white men, their madly waved hatchets cleaving the air, and two or three wild shots rang out from among them; but when in the moonlight they saw the rigidly raised rifles threatening them, they fell back in confusion, huddling together and glaring defiantly across the open space to the quiet, relentless handful of determined men who confronted them.

“Steady, boys!” was the command. “Stand your ground and keep ’em covered! Don’t shoot till I do!”

Standing beside the panting Pederson and in line with the other Swedes, Tevis felt the strange tenseness of the situation to its utmost.

“Hi-lo! hi-lo!” called Flamel to the Mongol band, waving his hand commandingly, but with his rifle still up-raised. “We come for pearl! We catchee pearl you stealee! You givem up now—savvy! Must havem pearl!”

"No sobee! Hip no sobee!" was the cackling, indeterminate reply.

"Yes, you do, damn you!" roared Flamel in a great bull voice, with a sharp upthrust of his rifle barrel. "And you've got to give 'em up! Close in on 'em a little boys!"

The men pressed forward about ten paces, their weapons still raised.

"We wantee boss!" called Flamel. "We talkee boss! Where is he? Come out, boss—we talkee you!"

"Hip no sobee!" yelled a high Mongol voice from the central group of the besieged. The voice continued in tones which Tevis took for those of the man in command. "We catchee fish, abalonee, shark, tuttle—no sobee pearl!"

"Oh, no! You don't savvy pearl," bellowed Flamel. "Well, I'll give you just two minutes, boss, to come out and deliver up the goods. You hear? Two minutes!"

"No, no!" grunted the stout Mongol, who was evidently the chief for whom they were looking. "You go 'way one minute!"

There was a flashing of hatchets as the bloused figures gathered about the spokesman and the gabble arose again, with wild accompanying gesticulations.

To this unexpected threat, Pederson who had been perking up in a bristling obsession, yelled savagely:

“Ve no savvy yo one minuten. Ve gif a tam for yo one minuten. Bah!”

“Shut up, Pederson!” called Flamel. “Hi-lo! You boss! We come from steamboat to catchee our pearl. You got—we must have!”

“No hob pearl! No hob! Hip no sobee pearl!” insisted the boss, though in a more subdued tone. “Me talkee you now all-right! Hip sobee Melican talkee.”

“All right, come out, boss, and let’s see you!” Flamel lowered his rifle and the boss stepped forward, accompanied by a half dozen of his men.”

“No—only the boss! We talkee him. You other fellows stay back. Savvy!”

The stout, moon-faced man, in the big blouse, waddled slowly toward the white men. He began a long, high-pitched goose-gabble of talk, in which he was from time to time supported by assenting nods and grunts from his men, who had calmed down to the aspect of quiet, everyday Chinamen and no longer showed anything suggestive of a hostile front, their weapons having disappeared from view. A few of them straggled over to the boss’ side and while he blandly and unctuously explained the entirely peaceful and legitimate nature of their business on the island, assuring Flamel he was mistaken in confounding them with the wicked shell-pile robbers, others of the camp slowly sauntered up to the white men.

“Guess we don’t make much out o’ this crowd,” observed Perkins to Tevis. “See the scar on that

chap's face?" He pointed to a nearby Celestial from whose yellow cheek there showed an old dirty white hatchet gash.

The man with the scar was talking in low tones to a member of his tong. While speaking he made a quick gesture and in the dark hollow of the loose sleeve of his blouse, Tevis caught the gleam of steel.

"Mr. Flamel!" he called instantly. "These men are getting too close."

"Stand back there, you fellows!" shouted Flamel. "Now, boss, we must have those pearls—savvy—or——"

His voice was drowned in a series of sudden yells from the boss, commanding calls, ringing high and wild, and swiftly answered by weird, cackling cries from the highbinders, while from the sleeves of a score of blouses flashed glittering hatchets.

"Stand back, there!" yelled Flamel. "Stand back!"

But the onrush of the highbinders was not to be stayed by a word. They sprang upon the surprised white men like wolves, yelling madly, their hatchets clashing upon the upraised rifles, now useless save as fending tools against the hacks of the short, swiftly wielded weapons of the unfair foe-men who had quickly planned this cunning method of attack that they might fight in their own favorite fashion.

Tevis felt a sudden coolness about the roots of

his hair as he faced the waving, slashing hatchets, but he sprang resolutely past the close-fighting mass of white-haired Vikings, who were throwing down their useless rifles and were making their six-shooters speak sharply and to good purpose, and on to Flamel's side. What, on the first, sudden uprush of the highbinders, had seemed the cobwebby unreality of the whole affair was riven and swept aside, and he saw the battle as a quick, sharp, vital clash at arms. There was a tumult in his blood. He himself became a Viking, full of the spirit of primal man. He raised his heavy Colt and sprang to the front with Flamel, while the boss of the highbinders fell back to the rear of his wildly fighting men.

There was a rattle and whirl of shots from the Swedes, and Tevis found himself firing madly with the rest, and with as little heed to consequences. As the valiant Swedes closed in upon the Mongols with their revolvers and knives, Tevis suddenly discovered himself in a pistol-and-hatchet argument with two pig-tailed men. One of these fell suddenly before him, whether from one of his own shots or that of the other whites he did not know. As the other Mongol lunged forward, he fired at him blankly, but miraculously missed, and the fellow bore down upon him with swinging hatchet. Tevis seized his loose-hanging pigtail, yanked him quickly to one side, dodged the hatchet-blow, and bore his man softly to the ground. A pair of bony knees dug him in the stomach and a pair of

sharp-nailed hands clutched wildly at his throat. There was a surge and heave of bodies all about him, harsh breaths, grunts, groans and alien, uncouth smells.

But the shock of battle had been wonderfully stimulating to his blood. He seemed possessed of a force that had been outside and beyond him and he wrestled vigorously with his madly writhing foe, grappling the wildly swinging hatchet-arm at the wrist, and trying to strike the man on the head with the heavy butt of his revolver, while all the time he felt the breathing, straining body under him. He thrust aside the claw-like, pricking fingers, grasped the shoulders of his man and held him to the earth, coming down hard and close upon him and dropping his revolver as he did so. There was a swish of air above his head, and, turning, he saw that his quick descent had saved him a blow from a hatchet wielded by a fierce highbinder who stood over him with upraised weapon, ready to strike again. Tevis coolly grasped his new antagonist by his loose-clothed legs and he came down like a tree beside the other man. Then he had the two of them to struggle with and the unequal combat must have resulted badly for him, but that a big Swede took his new assailant off his hands with a quick knife-thrust. At the same time some one in the struggling mass kicked Tevis inconsiderately in the face. It may have been the Swede, for some outside force had brought him down upon him. He groped about in the sand for his revolver,

but could not find it. The hatchet man beside him was lying quietly, and so was the Swede, but his first foeman was now wriggling out of his grasp.

All about him he heard shots, hatchet-strokes, the piercing gabble of the Mongols, the shouts of the Swedes and the scurry of flying feet. With his eyes searching the ground for the lost revolver, he saw two black, snake-like objects lying there—the long queues of the dead man and the living—and, reaching down, he kinked the braids in a hard knot that brought the two heads together, while his assailant squealed and piped like a dying pig and tried to free himself from the loathsome toils. But he rove the two queues together loop by loop, and drew them so tightly, that the two heads lay close up, and his man was securely anchored for the time. Then he sprang to his feet, and searched about in the sand for his revolver, finding it at last, and grasping its handle with a fierce joy. But there were now no combatants near at hand.

Looking about, he saw in the gray light of the quickly approaching dawn the figures of the Swedes running toward the cove in full cry after a band of Chinamen, while others of the pursued were getting into their boats and pushing off for the junks. As he ran down the beach he caught sight of Flamel and Pederson, the Swede well in the lead of the pursuing white men.

What seemed strange about the flight of the main body of hatchetmen was the fact that they

ran all bunched up, like football players in a flying wedge, protecting the man with the ball. Soon Tevis saw who the man with the ball was. He was the stout boss in the big blouse. His men were covering his waddling flight to his boat. It was for the reason that he was fat and slow-footed that he must needs fall toward the rear of the wedge in its retreat, and as the whites pressed down upon them, Tevis saw him flagging behind, as the others lost loyalty and compactness in their frantic efforts to escape their pursuers. While Tevis overtook and ran with the rest of the men, the fleet Pederson sprang in among the thinning rear guard, and seized the "boss" by the collar. The loose blouse came off in Pederson's hand and fell to the ground, while the man, freed from the clutch of the Swede, rushed ahead after the rest. But, strangely enough, he did not go ten steps, before he turned, a revolver in his hand, his round, oily face a picture of defiance. He made a desperate plunge back to the fallen jacket, and, planting his feet firmly upon it, swung his glittering weapon to right and left in the frenzy of an animal at bay. Pederson paused, for the pistol popped viciously and two bullets whizzed past his head.

"Run around behind him, Pederson, Johnson!" yelled Flamel. "Don't shoot him. He's the boss and he knows where the pearls are. The rest of you get after those chaps that are making for their boats. Keep 'em on the move."

The two Swedes rushed to the rear of the frantic

Chinaman, but he faced about suddenly and sent a bullet in between them.

"Better give up, old son," shouted Flamel, "and throw down that gun!"

"No sobee!" was the wheezy return of the boss.

"You know, I like that," said Flamel to Tevis. "He's the right kind—a man who doesn't savvy when he's beat."

To this compliment the defiant Oriental replied with a bullet that grazed Flamel's cheek.

"Oh, cut it out!" The first officer put his hand to his face. "I don't shave with that kind of a razor. Get in there, you fellows! Close in on his rear!"

But the infuriated man swiveled about on his jacket, like a whirlwind, his white shirt fluttering in the breeze and his gleaming pistol everywhere.

"Ay dank he no bin gotten any rear," said Pederson, quietly. "But Ay get him alledy same."

He rushed in upon the mad fighter and grasped at his pistol hand.

Bang! Zipt! A bullet whisked through the sand.

"There goes his last shot," said Flamel, while the pistol clicked on empty shells and the boss yelled to his men, who by this time were off in the boats amid a bustle of rifle shots from the pursuing whites.

Pederson seized the man around his stout waist, and bore him to the ground, where he clawed like a cougar, and would have fought off the burly Swede, but that two other men laid harsh hands upon him.

Even then, with three men holding him down, he squirmed, and heaved and the veins stood out on his fat forehead from which the sweat rolled in streams. Defiance still glittered from his eyes, while his hands clutched at the jacket.

“Now, boss,” said Flamel. “You got heap big lot of pearl—all belong to us. Where you keep ‘em?”

“No sobee!” persisted the man, with a grunt as Pederson’s knee pressed suddenly upon his chest.

“Oh, you heap savvy! Where’s the pearls?”

With one hand the prostrate man had been working at the blouse until it was now stuffed into the sand at his side. Flamel noted the action just as Pederson brought his knife within an inch of the fallen man’s throat, with the grim words:

“Ay dank I maken him tell all right.”

“No, Pederson,” cried Flamel, “don’t do that. Let’s have a look at that jacket. He risked his life for it, and it may be what we’re looking for.”

He seized the blouse and was pulling it out from under the boss’ body, when it was clutched tightly by the long-nailed fingers.

“You no takee coat!” gasped the boss. “Him my velly good coat. You letta me go now, you catchee hip money—gol’ money—tlee, fo’ t’ousand dolla. I catchee coat, go junk—fo’ t’ousand dolla. You sobee?”

“Aha!” cried Flamel. “They’re in the jacket all right. Tlee, fo’ t’ousand dolla? Not on your blooming pig-tail! Let go!” He pulled at the coat,

the Chinaman still retaining his clutch upon it. A violent yell and it was free from his grasp. The garment was of purple silk and well made, but the inside cloth had been torn in the struggle.

“Hold on!” cried Tevis. “Don’t lose ’em!” For out of the rent lining poured a half-dozen big white pearls. They fell in the sand and he picked them up, while Flamel gathered the garment together and rolled it up tightly.

“Come down this way where the sand’s harder, Tevis,” said the first officer, “and we’ll look into this thing on safe ground, where we won’t lose anything. Tlee—fo’ t’ousand dolla! I’ll bet there’s over fifty thousand in this thing.”

He took the blouse down to the wet beach, but when he unfolded it no more pearls fell out. He and Tevis looked closely at the garment, which was of good strong silk and heavily padded. It was rather old, and it was greasy down the back from much contact with an oily pigtail. Turning it over they saw that it was lined with a satin-like cloth, stitched on in curious ribs or strips. They fingered the lining closely, even into the loose sleeves, but could feel nothing that seemed like pearls; but pearls had rattled out of that lining, and there must be more in it somewhere. They laid the coat down on the sand inside out and pressed firmly down upon it with their finger-tips and palms, but through the cloth they could feel none of the hard little objects for which they were in search.

“This is a trick coat,” said Flamel mystified.

"He must have borrowed it from Herrmann, the Great. Let's cut out a little more lining and see what's inside."

Tevis took his knife and ripped up the lining from the bottom rent made by the boss's claws on the left side of the blouse.

"Ah," he exclaimed, "leather! The thing's got an inside lining, and these strips are put on to keep it in place." He made a lateral incision across several of the strips and through the leather. "Here you are," he said—"long inside pockets, not much bigger than pencils." He squeezed along one of the pockets and out of the cut he had made rolled three or four good-sized pearls, white and scintillant in the morning light.

"Yes," cried Flamel, "that's where they are. It's our lucky day. The thing's chuck full of pearls. That's what it was made for. I can feel 'em now. Just run your finger along that pocket. It's like a snake that's swallowed a string of beads. Let's try the other side.

Tevis cut through the double lining in the right side of the blouse, and squeezed out a half dozen black pearls.

"White on the left side, black on the right," cried Flamel, in high excitement. "The thing's as good as a gold mine. They've no doubt been robbing shell piles all up and down the Gulf." He rolled up the coat and tied it together by the sleeves. "We needn't look any further until we get aboard," said he. "Now what'll we do with

the boss? Guess we'd just better tie him up and leave him on the beach for his folks to look after him when they come back. Then we'll take care of those poor chaps of ours who went down in the fight."

"How many men have we lost?" asked Tevis.

"Three, I think—pretty well chopped up by the hatchetmen. They're lying back there by the camp. We've got to give 'em a decent burial, and there's two others that have got bullets in 'em. We've got to take care of them. Guess we'd better hurry and get 'em aboard as soon as we can. If you'll stand guard over the boss, Pederson and the rest can tend to the wounded and throw our dead into the lagoon. The pagans can look after their own."

"There's one live Chinaman back there queued up to a dead one," said Tevis, remembering his strange exploit. "What are you going to do with him?"

"Let him stay where he is."

He went back to the scene of the battle and while Tevis guarded the now quiet and subdued boss, Pederson brought some tag-ends of rope from the boats and secured him with a vindictive pulling of knots.

When Tevis saw the Swedes bearing the bodies of their comrades down to the water's edge he had to look the other way, for in their sorrow some of them were weeping and lamenting unto heaven. He heard the bodies splash into the lagoon, and turned aside with a sigh. He had known the dead

Swedes. They were worthy men and he would miss their faces from the crew.

The two wounded men had already been placed in the boats. There was now nothing to do but to get aboard the launch and speed away from the place which, as Tevis reflected, had been the scene of great fortune and of greater disaster. Taking the two rowboats in tow and giving the junks a wide berth, they glided down the lagoon towards its mouth, the curses of the coolies coming to their ears over the low waves and a half dozen rifle-shots making the water spout about them.

Just as they neared the mouth of the lagoon, they heard the yacht's whistle, long-drawn and distressful.

"Speed her up, Tevis!" cried Flamel from the bow where he was steering. "Something's the matter aboard the yacht. Wonder what he ran down here for anyway."

"Guess the old lady got anxious about us," said Tevis advancing the spark a little.

"But what's he whistling for? Must be something up."

"Dar's der yacht now!" exclaimed Pederson, as the *Searcher's* familiar lines loomed up beyond the reef.

They rounded the rocky cape steadily, though the boats dragged a little, and they could not run very fast. Flamel stood up in the bow as they passed the last point.

"Speed her up—throw her wide open!" he yelled, "or we'll never get there."

"What's the matter?" asked Tevis anxiously.

"Matter? Nothing much, only there's a damned gunboat after the yacht and it's just like Thrall to lose his head and run away and leave us to take care of ourselves!"

Tevis stood up in the boat. His eyes swept the great level of liquid light, the morning sea, across which the sun had begun to spread its rays of rose. To the west and near at hand was the yacht, standing off the mouth of the cove awaiting them. To the southward there was a curl of black smoke and the bristling masts of a steamer coming on rapidly, her hull showing plainly in the slanting sunlight.

"Do you think it's really a gunboat?" asked Tevis anxiously, advancing the spark to the last notch.

"Yes," replied Flamel, "no doubt about it. Must be the *General Torres*. She's the only cruiser they've got on the Gulf now. Yes, that's what it is. It's the *General* all right; and we've got to make a hot run for it or we'll see the inside of the calaboose at La Paz before night."

"Why, I thought you said we were prepared for such an emergency—the specimen-collecting dodge—how about that?"

"Can't be worked now—too much shell aboard, and we'd be caught with all this loot. Our only

chance is to run for it. Great Scott! What's the matter now?"

For the engine missed stroke after stroke, and wheezed, gurgled and did everything that it should not have done in such an emergency, finally slackening to half-speed.

"Better get out your oars," said Tevis quietly, turning the feed-cock and shutting off the gasoline. "We're hung up all right! Damn those batteries!"

CHAPTER XVIII

THE SPIRIT OF THE CHASE

TEVIS opened the battery box and fussed and fumbled about in it to ascertain the cause of the trouble, while the oars flashed in the sun and the men in the boats pulled like mad and towed the launch slowly along toward the yacht. It took him at least five minutes to find the loose binding-post which was the particularly thing gone wrong, but to tighten it was the work of a moment. He cranked the engine, which quickly took up its steady pulse and they dashed ahead again, towing the boats, with the men in them.

“Good boy!” shouted Flamel. “I thought we were done for that time.”

“Looked like it,” said Tevis, smiling in his victory over the obstinate engine. “Guess she’s all right now though.”

But the gunboat was showing bulky and threatening, and, coming on as she did, it was evident that she was trying to cut them off from the yacht. For a time it looked as though she would accomplish this object, but the launch was fleet, and she had not come up quite soon enough to effect this plain purpose; still, as the boats were delaying the

yacht, which could hardly sail away without them, as Flamel had feared, the position was very critical.

Now they could hear the blaring megaphone call from the yacht, Captain Thrale bawling from the bridge and ordering them to make more haste.

Mrs. Thrale stood beside her husband, beckoning madly and her voice ringing out above the bull bass of the megaphone:

"Come on! Come on! You're making no time at all! For mercy sakes, why don't you speed up a little?"

Hazel's white face over the rail came into view, and presently her voice mingled with the others.

"Oh, hurry, hurry, hurry!" she cried, beseechingly, across the narrowing strip of water that divided them from the yacht. "Can't you come a little faster?"

The launch darted ahead, as Tevis risked the crowding of her engine a bit harder in answer to Hazel's call. He rejoiced to think that she was with them, heart and soul, in their wild dash for liberty. It nerved him to his work and he did not make a single false move, though he risked running alongside without shutting off the engine until the last moment, so that they might lose no time in boarding.

Pederson and the other Swedes were as skillful in the handling of the small boats. In an incredibly short time they all hastened up to the side, and piled aboard the yacht, carrying the wounded men.

By the time the boats were fast to the davits the vessel was under way. But even before that the voice of the sea hawk demanded raucously:

“Did you get the pearls? Did you get ’em?”

“Yes,” said Flamel shortly.

“Did you get ’em all?”

“I think so.”

“Good! good! Good for you!”

There was a flashing gleam of triumph in the woman’s hard, greedy eyes.

“Where are they? Let me see ’em!” she demanded.

“They’re in this bundle,” said Flamel, handing the sleeve-tied blouse over to her with an impatient sigh. This having to answer to a woman captain, and particularly under stress of a menacing gunboat, was not to his taste. “Excuse me! The Captain’s calling.” He strode away, and Mrs. Thrale, clasping the precious bundle to her breast, scurried to the Captain’s cabin with fluttering skirts. To her the threatened attack of the cruiser was but the buzzing of a fly in this glorious moment of the recovery of the treasure.

Those of the crew who had quickly learned the good news gazed after her with satisfied smiles as she hurried below. Their shares were safe.

“But it didden bin yoost leekady picken it oop offen der beach,” explained Pederson. “Not yoost like dot. Vell,” he said, glancing toward the oncoming gunboat, “mebbe ve don’d keep ’em long

anyway. Ay dank dees Mexicans yump onto us soon as ever vas."

When Tevis had helped to secure the launch, which hung heavy in the davits and required careful maneuvering in swinging aboard, he leaned against a stanchion, just a bit fagged after all his strained efforts, and stared toward the *General Torres* which for the time seemed to be gaining upon the yacht.

"Oh, Edwin Tevis!" It was Hazel's voice in his ear, full of sympathetic agitation. "I'm so glad you weren't hurt, and I'm so glad you got away from those terrible Mexicans!" She caught at his hand and gave it a convulsive little squeeze, while he thrilled to the warmth of it and of her precious words. He minded not the commotion among the crew, the wild hum of the propeller, the cry of the Captain for "Full speed ahead," nor the nearing menace of the gunboat.

"We've been standing outside over an hour," she said to him, "but it seems an age. I heard the shots. Oh, there were so many of them! And then the awful silences, and more shots. And after it was all over, I waited and waited for the boats to come back. Then there was the gunboat, and I prayed you might escape her. Did you see? They tried to cut you off from the yacht."

"Yes. I hope we'll show them a clean pair of heels!"

"Oh, we shall get away," she said proudly. "No boat ever raced with us that wasn't beaten. But

she's dreadfully close, isn't she? Did you see that puff of white smoke from her deck just then? It was like——" The boom of a gun finished her sentence for her. "Are they shooting at us? Dear me! Isn't it terrible?"

"No," said he, "they're not really aiming at us. It's just a warning. A shot across our bow. We're supposed to stop now."

"But we won't," she cried resolutely. "We'll run away from them. We'll show them we're not going to surrender to any old tub like that."

"But you must go below."

"Oh, no; not yet. Let me stay a little longer."

Full of the speed and spirit of the chase, the brave girl watched the bull-dog pursuer astern, while shot after shot splashed in the sea about the racing, throbbing yacht, or skipped along the wave-tips, sending up sparkling aigrettes of spray.

Tevis wondered where Walden was, and judged that he was somewhere below.

When the *Searcher* settled down to the business of making speed she skimmed over the sea like a gull, and the Mexican, though straining hard to overtake her, soon fell behind. A shot came tearing through the yacht's rigging and brought a brace rattling and thudding down from the foremast. The men, under Thrale's nervously shouted orders, ran to clear the deck.

"You really must go below now, Hazel," urged Tevis; "for the *General Torres* is getting mad and he's begun to do damage."

"I'd rather stay on deck and watch the *General* fall behind." She smiled bravely. "He's losing rapidly now. And then I want to talk with you. I want to know all about the fight with the high-binders and about the poor men who were wounded. There was none killed, was there?"

"Oh, but you *must* go below," he insisted. "I'll tell you all about it down in the saloon. Come on! Come!"

She obeyed at last and went below with him, and they sat and talked while the roar of the *General Torres'* guns grew fainter and fainter.

"You don't like compliments," he said, "but did no one ever call you a brave girl?" He looked at her admiringly. "Most girls would have shrieked when that firing began and they would have fainted when the shot tore away the brace."

"I don't believe I'm so very brave," she said, smiling, "but perhaps I've taken a leaf out of Mrs. Thrale's book. She's the only other woman aboard, and she's so warlike. One easily gets to imitating, you know. I believe I should become a sort of pirate if I kept on. These things get into one's blood. Much as I have wanted to rejoin my father, it has been quite an enjoyable voyage after all, and this is the most stirring chapter of it."

She glowed rosily as she spoke and was so companionably confidential that he felt a budding faith in her interest in him. It certainly had been charmingly expressed when she saw him safe aboard after the fight and the chase.

“Yes,” he breathed earnestly, “I’m glad you have been along, for if you hadn’t been, the cruise would have been nothing to me.”

“Oh, you would have been so interested in these adventures that you would have forgotten all about me,” she said naively, getting up and going over to a port. “Look there! See how the gun-boat has fallen behind!”

He stepped to her side while she held back the little curtain.

“Yes; and she’s stopped firing. Well, I suppose she’ll give us up as a bad job now.”

“I told you she couldn’t get near us,” said Hazel. “This is a fast boat. But how did you get the pearls back from the Chinamen? I want to know all about it.”

He began the story simply, and, as he went on, her color heightened. When he came to the purple blouse she laughed gayly. They were both so interested in the narrative at this point that they did not observe the entry of another person into the saloon, but now a burry voice broke in:

“Ah, it was funny, indeed, wasn’t it?—upon my word—fighting with a lot of scurvy coolies over a few pebbles!” Sir Charles’ face was dark and heavy, and he spoke with the abandon begotten of wine. “Flamel has told me all about the fight,” he went on, “how you roused up the poor Chinamen and stole that fellow’s jacket. But of course,” he added jealously, “you and he are heroes now—to the ladies. Mrs. Thrale is probably waiting for

a chance to fall upon your neck, just as another woman I could name. You——”

What stopped the taunting stream was the sudden stiffening of Tevis' athletic frame and a look that blazed from his glinting blue eyes—a cold, hard, compelling look that bespoke a scorn as fine and as liberal as an Olympian god's. As he stood staring steadily and icily at the man, there was that in the iron compulsion of his gaze which sobered, awed and dominated him. Those menacing orbs looked him through with an implacable gleam, the face was white and full of a relentless rigor, while the lips curled in a contemptuous smile that conveyed almost as much of warning and of threat as did the eyes.

Terrified by the look and fearing violence, which she might have known would not have been displayed in her presence, Hazel stepped a little nearer to Tevis and said imploringly:

“Don't mind him—please don't! He'll think better of his words later, I know he will. Did you see how quickly we ran away from the Mexicans, Sir Charles?” she asked in assuaging tones. “They're away behind now.”

Walden moved his lips to speak, but his mouth was dry and his tongue failed him. She could see how completely that steely stare, that inexorable menace, had overawed and affrighted him.

Relaxing his rigor, Tevis turned a mild gaze upon her, lifted his cap with formal politeness and strode out of the saloon.

"Oh!" cried Hazel in a low tone, turning her accusing eyes upon Sir Charles, "how you deserved that—how you deserved being cowed and beaten by that man's contempt."

"Cowed—beaten? I like that!" He tried to carry off the incident with a light air, though there was a tremor in his voice.

"You wouldn't have liked what he would have done but for my being here. He looked capable of stamping upon you and throwing you overboard."

"Oh, he had a nasty, insolent air," admitted Sir Charles; "but I should like to see him try to stamp upon *me*."

"You—you're brave, aren't you? I don't see how one of your nature could brook his resentment that way. It must have been unwittingly. But there's one thing you must do and at once, too."

"What's that?"

"Go to him and apologize."

"Apologize to that electrician?" grumbled Sir Charles.

"To that gentleman."

"Oh, but I can't do it, I really can't. He's such a——"

"You shall apologize to him immediately, or I'll never speak to you again."

"Oh, I say, you don't mean that!"

"Go to him and say that you're sorry or I'll do precisely what I have said," she insisted coldly.

Sir Charles' eyes studied the carpet.

"Well," he muttered, "I didn't intend to make

any row. I—I—of course I was wrong; and I'll apologize. It won't occur again."

"No," said Hazel, sweeping past him out of the saloon, her voice breaking into a sob as she uttered the words, "it *can't* occur again. If father only knew! Wait until I see him!"

Sir Charles found Tevis in the smoking-room, moodily biting at an unlit cigar. The angry man stared at him with a challenging look which changed suddenly as the baronet said abruptly and as if forcing out the words:

"I'm sorry I spoke as I did just now. But you must have known it was just my way."

Tevis looked at him uncertainly.

"Did Miss Braisted ask you to do this?"

"Yes," admitted the humbled man in a low tone.

"Very well then," said Tevis with a sudden lightness of heart, "although I must confess I was waiting for you—to see you alone and—well, we'll say no more about it."

He took the flabby hand extended to him and gave it a slight pressure. Sir Charles turned abruptly and went into his room, muttering as he closed the door behind him:

"What rot! The idea of my apologizing to that electrician! I wouldn't have done it but for her. Why did she insist upon it?" There was jealousy, shame and rage in his tone. "Why? Unless, indeed, she loves him as I feared. But an electrician! It's impossible!"

In her room Hazel threw herself down upon her bed and buried her face in the white coverlet. She was very angry. She had found much to disapprove in Sir Charles before, but this was the first time he had openly insulted her. In her wrought-up, resentful state she found herself hotly framing a note that she would send to him, forthwith releasing her from what she had many times considered her odious betrothal to the man whom her father had chosen as her husband. Her father! But he must have seen, he must have known, and, knowing, approved. He would not have approved of Edwin Tevis. It was inevitable that the two men who had just stood in such sharp contrast before her—the one noble, valiant, fine, the other cold, insolent, selfish—should still remain, a picture of opposites. Tevis was so manly, so self-reliant; and the other so full of coarse hauteur and as readily condescending.

But the words of the letter framed themselves feebly when the thought of her father recurred to her. Now that his fate was uncertain and occupied so much of her daily and nightly meditation, her consent to the loveless marital arrangement seemed hopelessly fettering.

Yet there had arisen a mightier reason than her heart had ever known before for breaking the chains that held her, and that reason was Edwin Tevis. He loved her and—yes, she would own it to her heart—she loved him. She knew how her father, anxious for her to wed title, would scorn

the idea of her looking upon such a man in the light of a lover. She could see his hard face, his thin money lips, coldly laughing her down; she could see him dominating her in his iron way as he had dominated her dead mother. For one who was of the house of Braisted could know no will but that of its master.

Yet, despite it all, she would be thinking of Edwin Tevis. She could remember so many things he had said to her, and, more than all, she could remember the light of love in his clear, frank eyes.

It was he who had made this enforced voyage supportable and, in some passages, even delightful to her. But it could not last long. She would be going away and leaving him on the far rim of the continent—he who was to her the whole horizon. It was hard to think of this.

“Oh, father, father!” she moaned tremulously, her face half-smothered in the coverlet. Oh, if I could but speak to you! If I could tell you!”

Again the cold, commercial face of her father rose before her forbiddingly, and she knew that had he been there she would hardly have dared to open her heart to him, and if she had dared, it would have been a vain appeal.

Tevis went on deck, not much mollified by the forced apology. The terms of it were not to his liking. For now she *would* speak to Walden again—she would forgive him—and as for himself, he was still an outsider. But it might be that Sir Charles had cause for his jealousy. His heart

leaped at the thought. She had shown so much interest—such concern for him in danger—a concern almost tender in its expression. What was the logic of that concern if it were not love?

He went to the rail, and stood just opposite the belching stack. The engines were pulsing madly and the hot fumes from the fire-room came up, oily and sickening, through the deck grating. Over the side the sea was scurrying past and away astern the smoke of the pursuer lay low upon the water.

Captain Thrale came along, looking like a man just off the rack. His smile as he stopped near Tevis and looked astern was thin as winter sunshine.

“Well, we’ve shown her a pretty neat pair of heels,” observed Tevis.

“Yes; she’s hull down and out of it,” he said, with a twitching face, “but still you never can tell. She may have a few knots up her sleeve yet. I’ve seen things happen in ocean races you know.” They walked along the deck and up to the bridge together. Mrs. Thrale stood abaft the wheelhouse, gazing steadily through her glass. She had been keeping watch there almost since the beginning of the chase. Her cheeks seemed more tightly drawn and the corners of her mouth more sunken, but her hard black eyes blazed with victory.

“Didn’t we scoot away from ’em, though?” she said, triumphantly. “Didn’t we show ’em white water? I’m glad it’s all over. I’ve just been aching to go down and see what’s in that Chinaman’s

jacket. It's stowed away in the Captain's safe. Mr. Flamel says it's padded with pearls. I hope so, but men folks are so easily fooled." She started below. "Want to come along, Mr. Tevis? Come, Captain!"

They went to the Captain's office, where Mrs. Thrale opened the little safe and took out the greasy purple garment and laying it upon the table, unfolded it carefully.

"Smells like opium or something," she said, sniffing like a cat. "Now, I don't see," she went on, feeling along the strips sewn to the lining, "how there can be as much in this thing as Flamel thinks, though he did give me a few he'd taken out of it."

She pressed her finger tightly along one of the strips toward the cut Tevis had made through the lining and the leather, but her careful working down the seam was unrewarded.

"Merciful me! I'm awfully scared you've been fooled," said she disappointedly. "Padded with pearls! Why, it's as flat as a pancake. But here's something that will open it." She took from her pocket a pair of sharp-pointed scissors. "I'll just rip up them queer-sewed strips and see what's inside." Her scissors clicked in her nervous hands. She was cutting down from the top of the coat.

"Why, sakes alive! Now, I see where the mouths of them little pockets are that Flamel talked about. They're all around the arm-holes there and covered by that false pleat." She ran

her finger under the edge of a strip of braid and revealed a half dozen little round apertures. "That's them," she said, sticking her thin, long forefinger into one of the pockets, "and they run down deep. I think I feel something hard in there." She seized the scissors feverishly and cut away at the pocket-mouth. "My suz! It's tough as hickory! Let me take your knife, Mr. Tevis."

She clutched the knife from Tevis' hands and cut away at the pocket, ripping it down. The pocket was merely a tube of leather, neatly sewn—the same kind of leather Tevis and Flamel had found in the bottom part of the lining.

"Yes; here they are!" she cried as pearl after gleaming pearl rolled out of the slit. "Gracious sakes alive! Just look at 'em! Ain't they pretty? And such a lot! And there's a lot of pockets, at least ten, under each sleeve."

She ripped and slashed pocket after pocket, each yielding forth its handful of bright round gems, some white, some black, but all of good size and shape.

"And here's one as big as your thumb," she declared, as she ripped through a pocket larger than the rest, containing only a solitary gem. "That's worth five thousand dollars if it's worth a cent!" she cried joyfully. "They've been working for us—you don't know how long they've been pirating shell piles, but you can see what luck they've had. It's all for us! I don't feel anything on my conscience in taking 'em all. They won't half-pay

for the men of ours they've killed or the risks we've run or anything."

She smoothed her hand over the gems caressingly and then scooped them up with her bony fingers from the purple side of the coat on which they lay. The talons of the bird of prey kept working eagerly and gladly while she shrilled forth:

"Why don't you *say* something, Jim? You don't seem to realize what this means. Why, we're rich—rich as dirt—rich as them diamond dealers in that store on Market street where we looked in that day to ask the price of a half-dozen cheap little silver spoons. Silver? Our silver will be all gold-lined and heavy as anchors. And I'm going back to Maine and have a big house and a carriage and high-stepping horses and harness covered with silver. I'll show them Binghamville folks! I'll show Mrs. Giddings! And we'll invest our money and it will grow and some day we'll have a private yacht like this, and just as fast. I wish you could realize it, Jim."

"Oh, I realize it all right," said the Captain. "But I'm thinking about how we can get all this treasure safe home. There's all kinds of things that might happen."

"Yes, if you're silly enough to let 'em happen," retorted his wife contemptuously. She took her buckskin bag out of the safe and poured its contents upon the jacket with the Chinamen's loot. "See what a lot it looks like now!" she cried, her talons scooping the gems together. "It's thou-

sands and thousands of dollars. I wish we knew exactly. But it's a heap of money. It's——"

A great burst of sound from below decks broke off her exultant speech. There was a series of thumping roars and a screeching, long-drawn hiss as of escaping steam.

"Good God!" screamed Thrale, springing toward the door. "Something's the matter with the boilers!"

"Well, I'd like to know! What are you running out on deck for?" cried Mrs. Thrale, snatching up the pearls and pouring them into her bag. "Why don't you use your speaking-tube?"

The Captain ran to the pipe, blew down with a great gasp and stood livid and shaking, with his ear to the hole. Tevis was so close that he could hear the hard voice of McLaren, the engineer, penetrating the uproar from below.

"Blown out a boiler tube—that's all—only there's two men killed and one pretty badly scalded. Have to shut down for a while."

"Have to shut down?" repeated Mrs. Thrale when the Captain told her the direful news. "I guess not. It's too bad about those poor men; but that gunboat!"

"Yes; she'll be right on to us," groaned the Captain. "We can't do anything under sail, though the wind is good. I'll run up every stitch, though, and maybe Mac can get the engine in shape to do something before she comes up."

"Of all the pesky luck!" Mrs. Thrale put the

treasure into the safe and slammed the door. "Well, they ain't going to get them pearls away from me!" she cried, fiercely, "not even if they fire us full of shot and we sink by the weight of 'em! My country!"

"I'll tell you," said the Captain, "we'll work that first game we arranged for—the scientific scheme. We've got the specimens to show."

"Yes; too many of 'em altogether," sneered his wife. "If we were going to carry that out, we'd ought to have cleaned up them shell and stowed 'em under the coal or something. It'll never do in the world, Jim, and you know it. We've got to get away from him some way. Maybe the steam will be on pretty soon."

CHAPTER XIX

THE CHUBASCO

BUT though every inch of canvas was stretched to the breeze and the yacht sailed fairly along over the sunbright sea, the hull of the gunboat grew before the eyes of the anxious watchers. Every man who could be of the least service in the engine-room was set to work down there, and Tevis labored with the rest. At the best all that could be done in the present crisis was mere make-shift. It would have taken a skilled boiler-maker two days to put the tube in proper shape, but they had no such man aboard. Time was everything. Every clock-tick counted. When the engine could be so adjusted as to dispense with the broken tube, they could proceed under steam, though probably a little slower than before. It was a time of intense strain and anxiety. Though the chief engineer and his assistants worked swiftly and tirelessly, the cruiser kept nearing the yacht and from moment to moment they expected to hear the sound of her guns.

When, however, it was thought that the engine would be started again in a few minutes, and Tevis went on deck to gaze astern with eager eyes, he was glad to see that there was still a safe distance

between them and the gunboat. She had evidently been coming on a little slower having noted their obviously crippled state.

“What’s he up to?” he heard the Captain ask Flamel, as they scanned the Mexican from the bridge.

“He thinks he’s got a snap—going to run alongside and take us in without firing a shot,” said the first officer.

“Thought you said the engines were ready,” complained the Captain. “Why the devil don’t they start up?” He puffed nervously at the cigar which he held tightly between lips from which all traces of color had flown.

“They’ll be going ahead pretty soon,” said Flamel confidently.

But the screw lay silent, and, to add to their uneasiness, the breeze fell away, the booms swayed idly, and the yacht’s head began to veer unsteadily.

“Gee!” cried Flamel desperately, “We haven’t even got steering way.”

“For God’s sake,” cried the Captain, whistle down to the engine-room, Flamel. He’s got to start up right away or——” He looked back with frenzied eyes at the gunboat.

“Says he can’t get her to work just yet,” was Flamel’s cheerless word for the engineer. “Well, we’ve got Espiritu aft us now, and we’re nearly off San José. If he starts her up right away we can run close ashore in some of those wide shallow places where they won’t dare follow. There’s

miles of short soundings there, and those gun-boats are all deep draught."

Steadily the *General Torres* came on. It would not be long before she would be within hailing distance. Despite what Flamel had said about her running alongside, Tevis momentarily expected to hear the roar of her guns.

Of a sudden the yacht veered about in the slackening tide, her steering chains clattering and the shadows shifting aboard.

"It's all up with us—I can see that plain enough!" moaned Thrale, setting his teeth hard upon his burnt out cigar.

"No!" There was wild exultance in Mrs. Thrale's tone. "We're going to make it all right yet, and that's what will save us!" She pointed over the bow to where the sky was streaked and blotted as with enormous inkstains. "That's a *chubasco*, as sure as guns, and as dirty a one as you ever saw on the Gulf. And do you think he'll stand for it? No, siree! There's a safer place to leeward of that point over there, and he'll run for it."

"Think so?" said the Captain.

"Yes; you wait till she begins to drive; then this little picnic will be all over for him. It's nothing much to his credit anyway if he takes us, and he'll postpone the pleasure and 'tend to his own knitting."

"But how about *us*?" The *chubasco* will be

worse for us than it is for him!" Thrale groaned aloud in abject misery.

"Us?" she sneered contemptuously. "Why, we'll run before the wind, if it takes the two sticks out of her. We've got to do it, or they'll catch us as soon as it's over. They blow past pretty quick, if you lay head on, but if you run with 'em they'll take you a long ways."

Even as she spoke the near water whitened in the first rush of the great squall. The wind flirted in their faces, the yacht heeled and shivered and raced away before the gathering blast. The crew ran to their stations in anticipation of orders to shorten sail. The Captain sprang into the house to glance at the glass and came out with a very pale face.

"Never mind, Jim! We'll fight this thing out!" cried Mrs. Thrale, with a defiant sweep of her hand toward the coal-black cloud that was scurrying down upon them. If you'll give the orders I'll stay up here in the house with Mr. Tevis and send him to you if anything happens."

"All right," said Thrale, meekly. "Keep her nor' by nor'east," he called to the man at the wheel, "and dead before the wind." He turned and said to his wife: Maybe we can run it out, but we've got too much sail up. Mains'l ought to be doubled-reefed, and the others taken in."

"Single reef all around will do all right," insisted Mrs. Thrale, "and not a stitch more down till we have to. Them masts are stubby as iron-

wood trees. They'll stand all right. They've got to!"

The wheel house shook, there was a banging-to of doors on the lower deck and the wind hooted over their heads as the blackness spread about them. The Captain ran out to give his orders, Flamel going with him, remarking quietly to Tevis, as he went:

"This is *her* doings: but there's more dirt in this thing than she thinks. I wish she and her pearls were safe ashore somewhere. She'd drown us all for the sake of a handful of the gritty things."

Mrs. Thrale glanced at the glass and scowled. Then she glared through the darkness, her eyes ranging all about the sea.

"Good!" she smiled. "The dagoes have given it up! Can't see 'em anywhere. That was quick, wasn't it? They're off to leeward of the point, and they won't see hide or hair of us when it's all over. We'll be forty miles away if we're an inch."

There was a boom and clatter of mingled noises, shrieking wind, straining plates and timbers and ripping, swashing seas. The wind scuffled with the yacht like a vicious wrestler, the deck was swept by scudding rivers of waters, and then lay steeply aslant to the sea as the wind raged to another quarter in its wild, cyclonic twists. A chair in the wheelhouse went crashing down and Mrs. Thrale and Tevis were banged against the table,

nearly embracing each other in their efforts to keep upright.

The quartermaster was working hard at the wheel, upon which he bent his whole weight at times. Mrs. Thrale looked at the glass again, and the bar sinister came to her forehead, as the Captain blew in with a gust, dripping all over with spray, his sodden cigar-stub in his mouth, and his eyes wild with terror.

"Them sails has all got to come down," he wailed dismally.

"I guess so," she replied, looking at the glass again, and shaking her head, "but I hate like anything to do it. Not just yet, Jim. Wait till it comes a little harder. Get hold of that wheel with Joe, will you, Mr. Tevis?"

Tevis obeyed the order with alacrity.

"I don't see why in Sam Hill I can't run this ship myself," whined the Captain. "She'll turn turtle as sure as guns, if they don't come down right away. We're short-handed. We can't——"

"Oh, do it if you want to!" she cried, and Tevis blessed her inwardly for the words; for the thought of Hazel, crouching terrified somewhere below, nearly obsessed him. "But don't blame me, Jim Thrale, if that gunboat catches us after all."

Thrale ran out like a deer and bawled his orders to the men. Tevis saw the foresail sweep down to the boom, where the men fought with the whipping gaskets, and he rejoiced to see the righting of the ship, and to note the relief of her terrible strain.

The mainsail was taken in; but still they scudded before the blast, and the spray blew over their stern.

Mrs. Thrale blew down the tube again and again, but there was no reply. At last she sprang back, her face wrinkled in a triumphant smile.

“They’re getting up steam—steam—*steam!*” she cried. Glory! We can scoot to the end of the Gulf now, if we want to, and the dagoes will never set eyes on us again!”

While she spoke there came the good, grinding feel of the screw. The tension on the wheel relaxed, as the steering-gear came into play again, and Tevis and the quartermaster wiped the sweat from their faces.

CHAPTER XX

A BRUSH WITH THE JUNKS

By mid-afternoon the storm relented. Luminous streaks shot through the inkstains and whitened the wave crests, and when they ran under the lee of a small anonymous island and lost the cross-swell and the Titanic lift of the wind they felt that they were out of harm's way. The Mexican was nowhere. Mrs. Thrale was in the hallelujah stage of jubilation; the Captain was still pale, and Flamel went about shaking his head. He told Tevis he had had enough of feminine mastery aboard ship.

"Why, twice there she nearly ran us under," he complained. "We lost three men—washed overboard from the foward deck, and a couple of others are hurt. I wanted to give the order to cut away everything, but the Captain wouldn't stand for it. She braced him up. Good thing the crew didn't know who was doing it. There was blue hell among 'em as it was. They thought the old man was crazy."

Tevis started down the companionway to see Hazel. Some of the men had been knocked about and hurt, and he had seen little Yokio with his

arm in a sling. He was afraid something might have happened to the girl. But on the last step he met her, coming up. She was wrapped in a long ulster through which the wind outlined the shapely curves of her form.

"Wasn't it terrible?" she said. "We didn't have it half as bad as that coming around the Horn. But when they got steam up it seemed to help things."

"Yes," he said, "the engine is running all right now. Weren't you awfully frightened?"

"Not as much as I should have been, I suppose. You see I have a perfectly absurd faith in the yacht. Where are we now? Is the cruiser in sight?"

Before Tevis could reply she tripped up the companionway and he followed. She was very fetching in her close-clinging habit, and when she stepped on deck the wind made sweet mischief with her hair.

"Why," she exclaimed, "We're near a new island, and the storm is over. But I don't see anything of the gunboat."

"No; we've run away from her, a long way, I think. She won't bother us any more."

"You know," she said, clutching at her cap, "I've been thinking about those poor wounded men who were shot by the highbinders. I thought about them all through the storm, and I wondered what I could do for them. It must have been terrible for the poor fellows when we were tossing about. I wanted to go to them and do something

for them, but it was so rough. All I could do was to hold on to my berth."

They went foward and down into the steward's room to inquire about his charges. There they were told that two of the men had died during the storm. The others, who were not so badly hurt, were likely to recover.

"And to think," cried Hazel, "that their lives went out in all that din and uproar! Oh, why wasn't I here to do something for them?"

"Don't take on, Miss," said the steward. "Nobody could have helped them. They had to go. I saw that at the first, and it's better they didn't linger along and suffer."

"It may be, but I feel guilty," she insisted. "I could have done something—I know I could have done *something*. But these others whom you say were not badly hurt. Let me help take care of them."

"If you want to, Miss," said the steward. "There's one that has a hatchet cut in his shoulder, one with his leg broke, one with his head smashed, and——"

Tevis raised his finger warningly, behind Hazel's back and the steward ceased his recital of horrors.

"Here's the Jap," he said, as Yokio entered the room. "I haven't had time to put a proper bandage on his arm. It isn't broken, but he got a bad knock."

"Let me attend to it—tell me what to do."

Hazel laid aside her ulster and cap. "I'm going to be nurse," she said smiling. Tevis was glad for her sake that she had found an outlet for her eager sympathies.

"Here's Mrs. Thrale," she said while she was winding the bandage around the Jap's arm and he was helping her, holding the roll of absorbent cotton.

"Yes," said the sea hawk, I've brought down some elderberry wine for them that needs it. There's nothing better."

"Thank you, Mrs. Thrale," said the steward, taking the bottle from her hands.

"Now mind you," she adjured him, "it's only for the sick folks."

They held their northward course under a shining sun and a calming sea and before dark passed among the islands of Santa Catalina, Monserrate and Carmen.

Next morning they were at anchor off Tiburon Island and the sea lay about them like a slab of jade. The dead had been consigned to the deep just before sunrise when Tiburon was fairly in sight. Flamel said to Tevis as the water quietly closed over the last of the dead men:

"Mighty short-handed now—hardly enough men to handle the ship. As for pearl diving, I guess it's all off."

But as they neared Tiburon the old avid look came into Mrs. Thrale's eyes again.

“Nothing has ever been done on these banks to amount to anything,” she said to Flamel. “There’s been an awfully savage tribe—the Seris—living on the island, and they’d go for anybody that came near. But they’re thinned down now so there ain’t many of ’em left, and it’s safe enough. Captain thinks we’d better stay up in these waters for a while anyway till the gunboat forgets about us or takes after somebody else. So we may as well improve our time. We’ll let everybody rest until to-morrow, and then we’ll wet some of that extra tubing.”

Flamel was full of scorn because of the purposed extension of the diving work.

“Why, we can’t man two boats properly,” he complained to Tevis, “and with that highbinder clean-up we’ve got as much stuff as if we’d stayed here all summer. The old cormorant never will get enough. What we ought to do is to run down to Guaymas harbor, leave the yacht, sneak ashore and make off overland on the railroad, back to the States. And, mind you, the loss of the men means a lot more of loot for her anyway—their shares will all go to the ship.”

He went to the Captain who agreed with him in his usual tentative way and said he would “see.” But Mrs. Thrale won, as Tevis knew she would.

They worked along the island coves for a week, keeping always to the northward. The diving was all done in the daytime, but they were not molested. Not a sail did they see out on the Gulf, not a soul

ashore. If the Seris saw the yacht, which is likely, they made no demonstration.

The banks were rich, but not so fruitful as Mrs. Thrale had anticipated, and with only two divers at work, they did not greatly increase the bulk of the treasure.

Despite Sir Charles' jealousy of him, Tevis often found himself at Hazel's side. They talked, read, played ring quoits on deck or he turned the music for her at the piano. The young woman, who was essentially a social being, must, as Tevis argued self-interestedly, often have found the company of the unwieldy Sir Charles rather wearisome. But though she was willing to be entertained by Tevis and particularly enjoyed the ring quoits, he remarked, with a touch of irritation, that she seemed never to forget her duty to the man she had promised to marry.

"I'm afraid," she said to him one evening as they stood on the forward deck, well up in the bow, watching the sun sink, crimson and swollen, into the western sea, "that I'm a pretty poor pirate after all. You don't know how I've been longing to slip into an opera cloak and go to hear 'Lohen-grin' or something."

"An opera cloak would look strange here," he sighed, not fancying the flight she was taking, for it placed her in one of her remote longitudes.

"Yes; but it's November, and the Metropolitan season is open. The last time I went it was with father and Mrs. Poindexter. It was 'I Pagliacci.'

Caruso was wonderful!" She sighed gently. "But this cruise can't last forever," she went on. "Mrs. Thrale will be getting her bag full of pearls, and then she'll be willing to make port."

"No; it can't last forever." He looked at her with a clinging fondness and sighed in his turn.

There was a sudden stir forward. The Captain's boat call shrilled forth in a high tremolo and then a blast from the steam whistle rent the air.

"The junks again!" cried Hazel, pointing to where the lug-sails came trailing about the lower point, making straight toward the yacht under a fresh breeze.

"Yes," he said, starting forward at a signal from Flamel. "He's calling in the boats. There are two diving crews out to-day."

"Oh, I hope the Chinamen won't attack them!" he heard her say as he hurried along the deck.

"Well, Tevis," said the first officer as he neared him and they were both nervously intent upon the approaching junks, "they look like business, don't they? They're heading straight for the boats. They'll clean 'em up unless we can run over in time to do something."

They sprang forward to where the Captain was ordering up the anchor and blowing his boat-call until he was red in the face. The divers had been pulled into the boats and the men were rowing wildly toward the yacht, but four junks now interposed in a deadly line and rifle-shots began to fly.

"Jim, we must run in and save them boats!" de-

clared Mrs. Thrale. "No use you whistling to 'em any more. We've got to run in and save 'em from the Chinamen."

"Maybe so—if we can," was the nervous reply. "But it's shoal water in there. It's a big risk—it's a big risk; and the Chinamen may board us—we'll have to go slow, with the sounding lines."

"But we ought to try for it, Captain," urged Flamel. And so Thrale reluctantly gave the order, the screw began to whirr and the yacht headed shoreward, moving slowly while the head-line swished in the shallow water.

Meantime Tevis managed to get Hazel below, though she had insisted upon staying on deck, where Mrs. Thrale was flitting about and Sir Charles was big and brave with the largest rifle he could find in the gun-rack, banging away at the junks, though Flamel had ordered that no one should fire until the command was given.

"You're putting me down here out of harm's way," cried Hazel to Tevis "while you are going up on deck, and the Chinamen are coming." Her round cheeks whitened as she spoke.

"Stay here in this corner," he commanded, leading her into the little library alcove and seating her among the book-cases. "Keep this pistol in your hand all the time. If they board us, I'll run down here and look out for you."

"Thank you—thank you!" she cried. "But you must be careful. They will fire upon the yacht,

won't they? What will happen if they—Oh, you mustn't expose yourself—you mustn't!"

He closed a port hole near her and told her to keep away from it. Then he started to leave her, glancing back to where she sat among the book-cases. In that moment of their great peril she seemed doubly dear to him. Her half-finished question, "What would happen if the hatchetmen came aboard?" gave him a heart-sick feeling. Well, he would do his best to see that they did not come aboard. Of course the yacht could steam quickly away from them were it not for the men in the divers' boats whom to leave in the lurch would have been a craven act. He rushed up the companion, rifle in hand, just as Flamel gave the order to fire. It was but a feeble volley, that which was directed upon the junks from the yacht, and it did not cause the Chinamen to desist for a moment from their fell purpose of destroying the poorly armed men in the small boats who were falling like flies under their deadly fire. When the last helpless man in the nearest boat dropped limply across a thwart, the great eyes of his glossy diving helmet staring up to heaven, Tevis groaned aloud and, standing by Flamel's side, pumped lead with a fierce, vengeful hand. As the yacht neared the small boats he could see two wounded men trying to rise. One had a pistol in his hand which he bravely fired at the Chinamen.

The nearest junk now came about and showed her big ugly figurehead—a dragon with enormous

red eyes and a yellow crest. Her men were not visible, as they lay behind the gunwale, but their rifles spat vindictively and their bullets whistled over the yacht or plunked against its side. Another dragon turned its great red eyes upon the yacht and still another.

"Bout ship! bout ship!" rang Thrale's wild order.

"Isn't he going to try to save the wounded men in the boats?" cried Tevis to Flamel.

"What's the use?" was the cool reply. "They'd be shot all to pieces by those nearest Chinks before we could do a thing."

The yacht headed about speedily. There was a tremendous rattle of shots from the junks and a half-dozen bullets ploughed into the woodwork of the house near them. A Swede fell heavily upon the forward deck, his rifle clanging down.

"Too bad!" cried Flamel. "There goes another man. But we're getting away from them pretty lively now."

The junks quickly fell astern. Walden, who had not been seen upon the deck during the real attack, came up the companion, white-faced, but ready for a few departing shots which he delivered solemnly. Then, with a knowing shake of the head he went below again.

Tevis was just about to go below and reassure Hazel of their safety, when he heard the shrill call of a woman's voice behind him:

"The gunboat! Do you see her? Look there!"

Mrs. Thrale pointed southward where, whisking around the cape with belching funnel, the *General Torres* was coming on under full steam. "And the Chinamen—see 'em scoot for shore! That's all they can do now. They've sunk both our boats, the murderers, and there's nothing left for us but to vamoose."

CHAPTER XXI

IN THE CLAWS OF THE SEA HAWK

THE yacht was heading northward and the propeller was beating wildly, but with her poorly working engine she could not make her best speed. The Mexican was coming on, sending an occasional shot hurtling over them. But amid all their excitement the view of the shoreward flight of the Mongols presented itself as the most vivid part of the picture. The quick, scrambling, vitasopic action of the hatchetmen as they made away from the junks, in their frantic rush for shore, piping mad calls to each other, fighting wildly for places in the boats, and pulling like demons at big-bladed oars that splashed in the water or "caught crabs" in the lurch and toss of the overloaded little craft, was a strange sight and quite grotesque in some of its aspects.

But on the smaller junk of the four a number of men remained. The bow was pointed obliquely in-shore and the lug-sail slanted down until its boom dragged in the water.

"They're going to beach her," exclaimed Flamel, "and let the others drift. Wonder if the dagoes will think they're worth picking up. Yes; they're slowing down."

They watched the slackening cruiser, while the yacht's wake widened and she flew north like a wild goose.

"They're lowering a boat," said Flamel. "She's full of marines. And there's another. On Yick has put 'em up to this—he's been complaining of them, no doubt."

But no sooner were the boats in the water than the cruiser headed for the yacht again. She had merely sent the marines off to secure the junks while she renewed the chase of the yacht. Tevis started with Flamel for the bridge.

"I don't know what we're going to do," said the Captain scratching his fuzzy beard. "Even if we get away from the gunboat we're so short-handed, there's hardly going to be men enough to fire up. We shouldn't have let any of the coal-passers go out in the boats, Emily."

"May I come up and see?" Hazel's soft, round face showed above the edge of the bridge. "What has happened? Is that the cruiser after us again?"

Tevis gave her his hand to help her up the last step to the bridge. He explained their position, saying hopefully that as they had been able to run away from the Mexican before, they should doubtless do so again. She referred to the crippled boiler and looked a little anxious, remarking that their speed did not seem to be so great as it was in the former chase.

As Tevis looked back to the cove they had just

left he was sad. He thought of the brave men who had gone down in the boats sunk by the pirates. Among them had been the doughty Pederson and Jim Reynolds, his faithful helper in the dynamo room.

He and Hazel remained on the bridge half an hour, during which the positions of the two steamers seemed to be practically unaltered, although Captain Thrale declared from time to time that the *Torres* was gaining. The yacht hugged the northwest shoulder of the island and then stood eastward toward the Sonoran coast, it being the Captain's idea that in dodging the numerous headlands he could better shake off his pursuer, as the Mexican was bound to lose sight of the *Searcher* now and again. Thus in rounding the northwest cape, with its upstanding cliffs, the smoke of the gunboat vanished from their view.

"I'm glad we've lost her," said Hazel, "if it's only for a little while. She seems to be following us like a hound after a deer. Where are we now?" She addressed the question to Tevis, but he could not answer her more definitely than to say that they were off the north coast of Tiburon Island and were running eastward.

"Let's go in and see," he said, and they stepped into the pilot-house, where the chart of the Gulf lay out-spread upon the table. "Here is Tiburon," he pointed out the island.

"Why, it's close to the Mexican coast," she said, leaning over the map, the tip of her pretty fore-

finger on a long narrow strait that separated the island from the mainland. "I hadn't any idea it was so near. Let's see—what is the name of that coast land? 'Desierto Encinas.' The Encinas Desert. And look at all those rugged mountains. A very forbidding coast, isn't it?"

"Yes; everything about the Gulf seems to be rugged, harsh and dry."

As he looked at the chart he wondered what the Captain's object was in making toward the mainland. If the Mexican gained on them at the present rate he would run them down in less than three hours unless they should be able to dodge him. Tevis measured off the north coast of the island by the scale. It was fifteen miles from the northwest cape to Pearl Point, above which the mainland made a great Gulfward sweep, rounding itself into a curved inclosure, something like a large bay, to which the strait between the island and the mainland formed a long narrow southward-stretching outlet. It seemed likely that it was the Captain's intention to run down the strait, which was four or five miles wide and twenty-five miles long, and by dodging in about the headlands, keep out of the Mexican's clutches.

Hazel saw him pause with his finger upon the long outlet, which might be their way to freedom.

"What is that name—'Estrecho Infiernillo?'"

"Little Hell Strait," he translated. "See at the opening of it, there, 'Boco Infierno'—Hell Mouth."

“With Punta Tormenta on one side and Punta Desperacion on the other. I can tell what those mean.”

“They look cheerful, don’t they?” said he.

As a matter of fact, he was not at all pleased by the outlook. What was this Little Hell, into which one voyaged between Point Torment and Point Desperation? He had never had much confidence in Thrale as a navigator. Was he about to put the yacht and the remnant of her company, together with the precious life of Hazel Braisted, in dire peril, that he might escape from the lesser danger of capture by a modern cruiser, whose commander would probably treat them gently enough after confiscating their craft and treasure?

Glancing ashore he saw that they were rounding another headland and were making toward the Little Hell as fast as steam could propel them. Then he looked astern. The Mexican was coming on, grimly and swiftly, gaining on them at every turn of her screw.

“It ain’t any use, Emily,” Thrale said as he and his wife stepped nervously into the wheelhouse. “He’s got us. We may run along for a mile or two, but we might just as well head about, and wait for him.”

“And run up a white flag?” she sneered. “And take our pearls aboard and hand the whole bag over to the greasy dago, with our compliments and best wishes? I’d like to know! No, siree! We’re going to run that strait, just as I told you

we would. He won't dare to follow, and you know it."

"You're going to run the Little Hell?" gasped Tevis. "Have you looked at the chart? Have you——"

"That's just it," cried the Captain, clutching at the implied remonstrance as to a friendly support, "she doesn't know what it means. I've looked it all up. It isn't navigable. It's got a worse tide than the Bay of Funday. It's full of ugly cross currents, rips, williwaws, reefs, rocks and everything. Look here! Here's McGee's report on the thing." He drew a little book from a locker and opened it with quivering fingers. "'Bahia Kunkaak—funnel-shaped embayment, so placed as to receive half the volume of the incoming tide and to concentrate the flow into a bore, hurtling through Boca Infierno and thence through the shooting strait with greatly accelerated velocity.' From the Bahia Teopa (that's up here;" he pointed to the chart—"we're just getting into it) there is an unobstructed inflow by which the strait is reflooded with a counterbore * * * waters, heaped, pounded into an unstable churning mass. Flooding is little less than catastrophic in magnitude and suddenness.'"

"I wouldn't be scared out by a lot of big words," said Mrs. Thrale, with forced calmness.

"Sublocal winds are characteristic * * * swept daily by winds ranging from fresh breezes to gales so stiff as to load the air with sand ashore

and spray asea * * * Storm currents, tide currents, breakers, eddies, whirls, and cross-currents * * * Strait is safe only for portable and indestructible craft, which may be put off or carried ashore by craftsmen willing to wait for wind and tide.' There, what did I tell you?" cried the Captain excitedly.

"All the better for us, I should say." Mrs. Thrale looked forward on the bow. "This ain't a big boat. We can make it. He won't dare follow. We can run down lickety-scoot on that big tide—it's flowing now—right down through your Boca what-do-you-call it, and be as safe as a clam at high water."

"But this is a U. S. Government report," insisted Thrale. "McGee has been here. He knows what he's talking about. Look here: 'The tides are among the strongest and the tidal currents are among the swiftest in the world; and as shown by the extraordinary marine transgression, the waters are among the most turbulent known.' We'll never make it in God's world!"

"Don't swear, Jim!" she objected fiercely. "I ain't afraid, and you oughtn't to be. 'Extraordinary marine transgression?' A man who would write like that don't know as much about the sea as that cat there." She pointed to old Port, who had followed her into the wheelhouse. "We can go through all right. We can make it inside of an hour. And I tell you right now we're going to do it. You got us into this thing—you've bottled us

up in this little bay. There's only one way out." She thrust her sharp-nailed forefinger down at the strait. "That's through your Little Hell. We'll be around that point in twenty minutes and then we'll run it just as slick as lightning down a slippery elm tree."

"It can't be done," groaned the Captain. "Let's head over to the island. We could beach her over there and get ashore in the boats."

"Yes, and land on a desert, and be hacked to pieces by them hatchetmen that are ashore back there. They wouldn't like anything better. I say we're going to run that strait." There was an iron sound in her voice.

"And I say——"

"Oh, go to bed!" she shrilled. "I guess I know what we're gong to do."

"My God! What a woman!" groaned the Captain, fleeing down the main deck, Hazel and Tevis following him. He disappeared behind his cabin door. Tevis accompanied Hazel down the companionway to the saloon and left her with Sir Charles. He returned to the Captain's cabin and found him there, very red of face, and with a defiant look in his eye. That he had been bolstering up his invertebrate being with strong drink he made no doubt. With Flamel and the boatswain, he followed Thrale up to the bridge, where Mrs. Thrale was giving undisputed orders to the unresisting little quartermaster at the wheel.

"Emily," the long-dominated, but now rebel-

lions husband cried sharply to his wife, "I want you to get out of that house and off the bridge. I can run this ship and I'm going to do it."

"Mercy!" she flamed forth, at these words of insubordination. "Well, I'd like to—— What's this? Are we slowing down?"

"Yes; I gave the order just before I came up," said Thrale, with a mixture of deference and defiance.

"You *did*?" she blew out like the back-draught of a furnace. "Well, I'd like——"

"Yes; I did, Emily. Come out, now, and let me run the ship. First thing you know we'll be in that hell-mouth, and God knows where we'll land."

"Swearing again, are you? Seems to me, Captain Thrale, something's the matter with you." She came over close to him as he stood half in and half out of the wheelhouse. "Your face is as red! Goodness sakes alive! You've been drinking! I smell it on you. Where did you get it?"

There was a dull roar astern and a shot flew over the deck.

"Hear that!" she shrilled. "He's closing in on us now. He wants my pearls, but he ain't agoing to get 'em." She flew to the speaking-tube and yelled down: "*Full speed!* Crowd on all steam! Put every coal-passer to work. Get every knot out of her you can! Captain's orders!"

"But it ain't Captain's orders!" protested Thrale, pale with fright.

“Straight ahead!” she shouted to the wheelman.
“East, one point south.”

“Head about!” called the Captain. “Head about!”

She turned upon him; while the little wheelman stood confused and another gun boomed forth.

“Mrs. Thrale!” cried Flamel. “Do you know what you’re doing? I’ve stood enough of this. You can’t run me any more.”

“Mrs. Thrale!” echoed the boatswain. “You ain’t a-goin’ to run me neither.”

“I think,” said Tevis, looking sharply at her, “that we’d better do as the Captain commands.”

The quartermaster spun the brass spokes of the wheel and they glittered in the sunlight. The yacht’s nose turned to starboard, in obedience to the Captain’s order.

“Let go that wheel!” shrieked the sea hawk, her face a black cloud of wrath and her beak in the air. She sprang at the little wheelman, grasped him by the shoulder, thrust him out of the house, banged and locked the door and yelled through the glass:

“Run up your white rag! Surrender, if you want to—the whole pack of you! I’m not going to give up this ship to any garlic-eating greaser. I’m going to save my pearls!” She grasped the wheel in her bony hands and sent it whizzing back, the nose of the yacht coming about quickly.

The Captain threw up his hands and then leaned against the house, his body drawn up into a sad,

despairing bunch. The *Searcher* gathered speed and beat rapidly toward the strait. She was still a half-mile ahead of the pursuing gunboat. The men who looked disconcertedly in through the heavy plate glass at the strange, defiant woman, her eyes, gleaming like electric lights, fixed upon the little open space of wild water between the beetling cliffs ahead. Her cat sat upon her shoulder, clinging as tightly to her as she clung to the wheel. Her dark head against the cat's white, fuzzy body was singularly strong in outline, her insistent nose and her thin, tightly drawn lips gave her the firmness and fixedness of a creature carved in stone. The little steamer neared the high, threatening Punta Desperacion amid the thrash of a wild tide-rip, the thundering boom of the surf and a wind that bawled and clamored. She breasted the point in a sweeping, swirling tide and dashed straight into the mouth of the Little Hell.

CHAPTER XXII

THE LITTLE HELL

FLYING down the great flume of the Infiernillo, the yacht, stout and staunch as she was, was no more in that Homeric tide than a snarl of kelp or a dead rush. Whatever of independent motion she held by the twirl of her busy screw was barely to be perceived. Staggering like a wild inebriate, reeling to this side and then to that, she was sucked into the Boca Inferno. Her bow rose heavenward and presently pitched down into dreadful depths, her stern out of water and her propeller racing like a windmill in the empty air. Now and again the whole tight bulk of her would be tossed back and forth like a tennis ball. From the rocky foreland rang the white outcrash of the wildest of wild seas.

At times great twisting devil's holes in the wicked water appeared suddenly at her side, and when one of these giant whirlpools flung against her with harsh impact, she shivered all over and the cry would go up, "She's struck! She's struck!" But when she had swung half-about and lurched free from the whirlpool, she would plunge on again, snowy sweeps of spray flying to the tops

of her masts, while she settled, rose and darted crazily down the strait.

Captain Thrale clung to the handle of the wheel-house door, his baggy clothes a-flutter, glaring in upon the wild woman at the wheel, who stood with set teeth and gleaming, far-away eye, as oblivious of him as of the strip of oil cloth under her feet. But Flamel, stirred by the peril, flew about the ship, ordering the hatches battened down, sending Tevis and the boatswain on this errand and that and making all the men work like fiends. So that although he was desperately eager to reach Hazel's side and to aid and comfort her, Tevis could not get down to her. Even when there came respite from his labor on deck and he stood clutching at the rail abaft the funnel, Flamel would not let him go.

"Keep your station there, shipmate," he cried, as he ran forward. "You'll be needed at any minute. There'll be hell to pay here before long, or I'm a Dutchman. This is what comes from petticoat piloting. I'll see 'em both damned before I ship with 'em again, and you can lay to that."

Between Punta Tormenta and Punta Desperacion and for a mile or two further down the strait the land lay close on either side and loomed sharply under the afternoon sun; but a little further along in the turbulent tide gusty flaws of wind shot over shore and sea, sending up great puffy clouds of gray pulvis from the desert reaches of the mainland. These strange powdery mists

presently swept over the ship and obscured the sun, so that they could see but a little way about them.

Quickly the wind rose to a booming gale, and everything aboard was clattering and swaying while the already extravagant motion of the ship was increased to a sort of demon's dance. There was a terrifying helplessness in her strange lurches and rolls. She would fall headlong down a watery slope, tumble with a side twist and be righted by a merciful blow, while the gale scuffled about and the dun clouds swept gigantically down. Looking aft in the growing darkness of the dust-storm, Tevis caught dismal glimpses of the battered companions, the foot of a mast or the sprawl of a parted guy line.

A door near by banged harshly, a snowy skirt fluttered at his side, he heard a gasp, and Hazel's hand clutched the rail near his.

"You!" he cried, his heart knocking desperately in his breast. "How in the world did you get here?"

"Through the upper boiler room passage and out the side door. I had to fight to get it open." Her voice rose high. To be heard above the roar she had almost to shout.

"But you must go back!" he commanded. "I can't let you stay here. Where's Sir Charles? You must go to him."

"He's in the saloon. He's—he's ill. Please let me stay! I'll do everything you say."

“Very well,” he said at last; “but come in here close to the lee of the house and cling hard to the companion rail. Don’t let go for a minute.”

A rousing sea swept over the stern, and the yacht rose, shook herself and flung sidelong into the trough. They did not speak, for very terror, until, as by a miracle, she righted herself and plunged on.

“Do you think she can live through it?” Hazel shuddered and crept a little nearer to him.

A hooting blast swept down upon them, as they stood there, threatening to tear them apart, while the whole dun world reeled with the ship. He threw an eager, defending arm about her, and drew her close to him, in a precious, grateful contact.

“I don’t know,” he said, full of the exhalation of her close presence, the feel of her warm body next to his. “It looks bad, but whatever comes we shall face it together, and if we die, dearest, we shall die together. I don’t care to live a moment longer than you.”

She drew back a little, struggled gently in his grasp, her bosom heaved, the gale swept two great tears from her white cheek. Then she remained quietly in his arms.

“Yes, I know,” she said. “I know. But——”

The wind blew her words away from him although her face was so near his. She struggled out of his arms, and stood gazing through the murk and the flying spray. “But we’ll go through

this all right!" she cried with a burst of confidence. "She's a wonderful boat. Look! the sea isn't so rough down there ahead. We're in smoother water. We'll soon be out of it. Merciful heavens! What's that?"

There was a rending shock, the ship shivered like a man collapsing under an awful blow, she listed frightfully, swung half-about and one of her masts crashed over the side.

"What *was* it?" cried the girl in an access of terror, as he threw his arm about her again to save her a fall to the upslanting deck.

"We've struck!" he exclaimed hopelessly. "It can't be anything else. Cling to me! Why don't you cling to me?"

She obeyed, trembling in every limb. He seized a life-buoy that hung against the house, tearing it down and fastening it about her waist.

Thrall staggered aft, waving his arms and screaming orders to the terrified crew. Tevis saw Yokio and two other pantry boys, with the cook and quartermaster fly from a doorway. Then came McLaren, the engineer, two coal-passers, and, last of all, Sir Charles lumbered forward, clutching at a broken brace that snarled, along-deck. His face was white. He glared at Hazel and Tevis out of eyes that seemed to have just awakened out of sleep then hurried into the forward house.

Tevis did not see Flamel nor the boatswain and feared they might have been washed overboard.

As for Mrs. Thrale he fancied her as still hugging the wheel. He saw the Captain and some of the men making for the boats, tearing at the davit lines which swayed wildly in the swinging blocks. Tevis did not move. It came to him quickly that their best chance was in staying by the ship, hopeless as was the outlook; but Hazel sprang forward nervously, as if to break from his grasp and run to the boats at the wild call of the frenzied Captain.

"Don't move," commanded Tevis, tightening a knot in the buoy line about her waist. "She may right herself."

He stood waiting while the sea flooded over the port side. She begged him to seize another buoy that was near at hand. He was about to do so, when the yacht pitched sternward and a mighty wall of water swept over and engulfed them. Clinging tightly to the loose sleeve of the girl's stout jacket, Tevis was tossed upward like a fish-bob and heaved forward by the resistless avalanche of water. Nothing seemed more certain than that they were both overboard and at the mercy of the mad waters. It occurred to him that in clinging to the girl, he was lessening her chance of escape on the life buoy, and he was debating whether or not he should let go, when of a sudden his feet struck something hard, and a white object rose before him. It was a rail stanchion, and he threw his arm about it, hugging it desperately, still clinging to Hazel, who was being tugged away

by the embracing wave. He pulled her back and close to him and rejoiced with mighty exultation, for the receding sea had left them upon the wheel-house deck. Yes; there was the battered little bridge in its railed enclosure and there was the white side of the house, and the plate-glass windows, and Mrs. Thrale standing inside, still clinging to the wheel.

After a long, deep intake of breath, he spoke to Hazel:

“Are you all right, dearest?” he said, his lips to her ear.

She made no reply, and lay limp and inert in his arms. The deck rose free from the water, for the stanch yacht had righted herself at last. Whether or not she was leaking badly as a result of her striking, he could not tell, but this much he knew: She was afloat and running in the stream, which seemed strangely quieter, though it was still rough enough.

He worked his way along the bridge, dragging Hazel with one hand, while he gripped the rail tightly with the other, and reaching the wheelhouse door, he turned the handle. The door was still locked. He rapped desperately upon the glass. For a few minutes Mrs. Thrale paid no heed to his knocks, appearing not to see him. Then she glanced down through the glass. Her face changed a little and she reached out one hand and turned the key in the lock. He opened the door and bore

his burden of collapsed womanhood inside, and, for want of a better place in the incommodious room, laid her upon the table. Then he chafed the white hands, tore off the life-buoy, and loosened the clothing about her throat. He could not tell whether she had been injured, but judged that the breath had been beaten out of her by contact with something while the waves were tossing them about.

While he worked to restore her, Mrs. Thrale stood silent, tugging at the wheel.

“Can’t you *do* something for her?” he cried desperately. “I’ll take the wheel.”

“Take it,” she said, “my arms are nearly dead. Keep her hard-aport. She’s making water fast. There’s nothing left now but to beach her. There’s a place over there,” she nodded toward the island, “that seems like good water—probably an eddy—it’s to lee of them rocks. I’m trying to run her in there.”

“All right!” He grasped the wheel, and she turned to Hazel.

“Poor child,” he heard her say, and when after a moment he turned anxiously, he saw that she had loosened the girl’s clothing at the waist.

“She’s beginning to breathe all right now,” said the woman after a while; “but don’t look this way. Stick to your wheel.”

They glided into the eddy, to the lee of the rocky headland, and the wind, with its obscuring clouds

of dust, left them of a sudden. There was a slow cessation of the beat of the screw.

"Water's up to the furnace grate," said Mrs. Thrale simply. "No more power."

"What's keeping her afloat so long?" he asked.

"The compartments. Lucky thing she struck astern. I expect she banged sideways on a rock. Isn't this a splendid cove—almost like a lagoon. We can beach her here all right. She's got head enough."

"Oh," he heard Hazel gasp softly, "am I still on the yacht? I thought we went overboard. Where is Edwin?" And he blessed the sweet voice of her, his heart vibrating to its music and rejoicing in the sound of his name from her lips.

"Tevis?" said Mrs. Thrale. "He's all right. Just lay back now and rest. My, but your things is wet! But they can't be changed now!" She turned her eager eyes ashore. "Yes, we've got way enough to run her close up to that little spit, and the eddy will help, for it sets inshore. Isn't it nice and smooth in here? Good gracious! I didn't think she'd strike so soon."

For there was a great crunch, a heavy grinding down below, the bow swung about, and the *Searcher*, her head high and her after-rail down to the level of the water, lay aground on a bank of gravel within two hundred feet of the spit.

"She lays lovely!" cried Mrs. Thrale. "I guess them Greasers won't be hunting us down here. My, what an awful run! We made it though, and

we're safe! But the Captain! Has anybody seen the Captain?"

She ran out upon the bridge and whisked down the steps and along the deck with fluttering skirts.

CHAPTER XXIII

THE STRANDED YACHT

TEVIS turned to where Hazel was leaning back in the chair, her clothes still dripping and in sad disarray. She smiled sweetly at him, the old shine and sparkle in her eyes.

"Where are we now?" She stared out of the window. "Why, we're near shore and in still water!"

"Yes," he said, "we're safely out of it. "How do you feel?"

She shivered a little in her wet clothing.

"I'm all right," she said. "But Sir Charles? I must go and look for him. He may be drowned. I must go and see."

"No," said he; "let me go." He ran out of the wheelhouse and followed Mrs. Thrale along the deck. She had been looking elsewhere for the Captain, but had not found him. On the whole deck they saw not a soul save Yokio, who appeared suddenly out of the upper boiler-room door.

"Where's the Captain," demanded Mrs. Thrale, the furrows showing deeply in her brow. "Where is he?"

"No; I no see Captain," replied the Jap. "I see firs' officer and engineah. Tha's all I see."

Flamel came out upon deck, followed by McLaren.

"It caught me down below," said Flamel, to Tevis. "Lucky thing for me I was forward. Had all I could do to keep that drunken Walden from going aft and drowning himself. Wouldn't mattered much if he had."

"Is Sir Charles safe, then?" asked Tevis, with strangely mixed feelings. "Is he safe?"

"Yes; he's safe enough—sobering up down in the messroom. He and Mac and Yokio were on deck when she struck, but they got down below somehow."

"But where's Captain Thrale?" shrieked the woman. "Can't nobody tell me where he is? Why do you all stand gaping around? Why don't you hunt for him, I'd like to know?"

They searched all about the yacht, above and below decks, down to the edge of the water, which stood knee-deep in the saloon, but they did not find the Captain. In the messroom Tevis saw Walden, red-eyed and raging over the unhappy turn of affairs. He stormed aloud and then leaned upon the table and groaned and lamented over what had befallen the yacht, bewailing her loss as though it had been a purely personal one, which he doubtless considered it. He seemed to have learned somehow that Hazel was safe, for he asked no questions about her. Tevis left him lamenting and went upon deck. Mrs. Thrale was sitting forward, alone, in the high bow of the boat, scanning the sea

sadly, her head in her hand and her black figure strangely drooped and shrunken.

"She's given him up," said Flamel. "The engineer's told her how it happened. He saw the old man and the others washed over the side by the big wave after we struck. Well, this is what petticoat piloting come to." Then his voice softened a little and he said: "Poor old girl! I guess she's sorry now she took things in her own hands. But I don't know. She's got her treasure, and that's a great consolation to her."

"Don't say that." Tevis gazed forward compassionately at the desolate figure in the bow. "Remember how many years they sailed together."

"And remember how many jawings and hen-peckings she's given him," sneered Flamel. "He's better off where he is."

Tevis hastened back to Hazel and assured her of the safety of Sir Charles. She received the news calmly, saying:

"I'm very glad." But there was no great joy in her voice. "I wonder if my room is flooded," she said presently.

"Yes, but I can wade in there and bring out anything you want."

"I shall need a lot of things. A warm wrapper, a pair of shoes, and stockings, a sweater, a—— Do you suppose you can guess what else?"

"I'll try," said he. Hastening below, he proceeded to ransack her lockers in search of such

feminine garments as he thought she would require. It took him a long time to make the selection, and he was fearful of the things getting wet, as he was splashing about, knee-deep in water. In the white coverlet of her bed he bundled up a red woolen wrapper, together with what he considered a fairly complete outfit of pretty garments of various shapes and all wonderfully sweet because of their association with their wearer. Gathering the four corners of the coverlet together he carried the bundle carefully up to the wheelhouse.

"Thank you ever so much," she said as he laid the loose luggage upon the table.

"The key is in the lock," said he, as he closed the shutters and went out.

She was not long in dressing, and when she opened the door again she looked fresh and sweet in her clinging white sweater. She was arranging her hair as he came to the door and asked what else he could do for her.

"Nothing," she replied; "only I think every well-arranged wheelhouse ought to be supplied with a mirror and combs. When are we going ashore?"

"Why," said he, "Mr. Flamel says we're very well off where we are for the present. The tide is falling so rapidly that we'll soon be high and dry."

"I don't suppose there's the remotest chance of the yacht ever floating again," she sighed, leaning back wearily in her chair.

"No," said he; "but we'll get off someway. Let me roll up that bathrobe and make a pillow for you."

"Thanks," she said, after he had performed this service. "That will do very nicely. It's lovely of you to take such pains for me. I shouldn't have gotten along at all." Her head dropped upon the improvised pillow.

An idea seized him, and he left her abruptly, ran down to her room, gathered up the blankets, sheets and pillows from the bed, and called Tokio to help him with the top mattress, which was in two sections. He and the Jap carried the bedding up to the house, where he piled the parts of the mattress, one above the other, upon the chart table and made a comfortable couch, into which he assisted her.

"Oh, this is so comf'y," she sighed, as she sank down upon the bunk. "No, I'm not ill only—only so tired!"

"Yokio can bring you up some tea and toast from the pantry," he said, as he went away; "and I'll send Mrs. Thrale to you as soon as I can get hold of her."

Then he went down to his own room, which being well forward, was not flooded, though threatened by the settling and shifting of the ship. He changed his clothing and came on deck again, where he found Flamel and the engineer. They discussed the situation. It was agreed that they were in no immediate danger from the sea. They

had run aground at high water. The tide was now falling rapidly, and would continue to do so for a few hours. As nearly as they could make out, they were a little over half-way down the island, at the point where the strait was widest, which fact accounted for the water being smoother there than elsewhere in the Infiernillo; but, looking out from the cove, they could see, beyond the circling eddy, the wild water of the channel, still turbulent and forbidding, though the wind had evidently abated a little.

"There's two of the boats left," said Flamel, "the launch and the gig. The gig's no good—it's had a bang from something. The launch will be all right when she's bailed out. But I don't like risking that channel again until it's a good deal smoother. When a pot like this gets to boiling it keeps on for a while. It's that big wind that's done it, with the ugly tide they have here, and there'll be choppy seas and cross swells and God knows what all, for a day or two yet. We can wait here aboard, I guess, unless something happens. As for me, I don't want to take any chances ashore on that island. It's an awful country, and if the Seris didn't get us the hatchetmen who came ashore from the junks would, for they will be prowling about."

"Do you suppose they'll attack the yacht?" he asked apprehensively, thinking of the girl in the wheelhouse.

"Of course they would if they found her; but

she's pretty well out of sight behind those hills there, and the island's a big place. They might not run across us for several days."

"How about the rifles?"

"What's left of 'em is forward there in the Captain's cabin and safe enough, but there isn't much ammunition, and mighty few men to handle the guns. You see, there's only five of us left, counting Yokio and the Englishman. This cruise has cost a lot of lives." He sighed. "The Jap's a good little fighter and the Britisher may be all right if we can keep him sober."

"You haven't counted in Mrs. Thrale," said MacLaren, with Scotch canniness. "She's as good as a man. She's gone all to pieces over the loss of the Captain, but she'll coom thegither again. And there's the lassie—she can pull a trigger. So there's seven of us althegither. Don't you think we ought to get the rifles ready?"

They all went forward to the Captain's cabin.

"Poor old man!" sighed Flamel, as he entered. "There's his pipe and pouch, just as he left 'em. He was a mighty good old chap after all, if you let him alone. But that wife of his got the upperhand of him, like a bad habit."

"There's mighty few guns left in the rack," said Tevis. "Only three—a rifle and two pea-shooters, for that's about all those shotguns amount to. But there's six or eight revolvers—pretty good ones, too—and, let's see—seven boxes of cartridges, three pistol, two rifle, and two for the shotguns."

"What's that safe open for?" asked the engineer, pointing to the corner where the door of the strong-box stood ajar. Better lock it up, hadn't you, Mr. Flamel?"

Flamel glanced into the safe.

"She's taken out the pearls. She's got the bag tied up in her clothes, no doubt, and wearing it around."

"Ah, she's canny!" smiled MacLaren.

Flamel closed the safe-door and locked it. They armed themselves with revolvers and took the extra weapons over to the shoreward side and stowed them in a tool closet, handy to the deck.

"Now," said Flamel to Tevis, "if you'll take these glasses and go up on the bridge and keep a sharp lookout ashore, we'll have Tokio get out something to eat, and send you up a snack. We'll keep regular anchor watch—you and Mac and me. Mac, you order the chow and I'll see what I can do for Mrs. Thrale. She's up there in the bow as still and stiff as a figurehead. She's mighty sorry for the loss of the old man. Maybe she wishes she hadn't been quite so brash."

Taking the glasses and the rifle, Tevis mounted to the bridge. The door of the wheelhouse was closed and the shutters were drawn. One of the windows was down a little way from the top. He was glad to think that Hazel was resting so quietly in there. He tiptoed about the deck that he might not wake her should she chance to be sleeping. He

glanced fondly at her door now and again, but for the main part he was all eyes for the shore.

It was a wild and desolate land, this of Tíburon Island, and nothing more mysteriously forbidding could well be imagined than the picture he saw from the yacht. Bare, high buttes rose inland a few miles away, while the nearer foothills, arid, rock-dotted and brown, rounded away to a low strip alongshore, where the sand lay in little white dunes. A half-mile north the hills parted in a great gulch, that ran down to the shore, and in this rift grew mesquits, palo verde scrubs and sahua-ros, with an occasional spear-shaped agave. If any enemy attacked them he would come through this gulch. For the bowl-shaped cove was guarded to seaward by high, impassable scarps both up and down the strait—rocky barriers that hung out over the water and terminated in islets of rock over which the spray dashed high. That the yacht had driven her way in among these rocks to her safe position on the shingle seemed a miracle. But there she was and, so far as could be predicted for the time, there she would remain.

CHAPTER XXIV

THE TAMING OF THE SEA HAWK

THE tide fell so rapidly that by five o'clock in the afternoon—about an hour and a half after Tevis began his watch—the spit had stretched its narrow tongue out to and beyond the yacht, and, looking over the rail, he could see the water pouring out of the great jagged hole in the port side, near the stern. The steel plates were rent and bent where they had struck the rock, and the hole was a desperately ugly one.

Even with the advantage of having the yacht on the beach it would be impossible for them to repair the damage or to make shift till they reached port. An idea occurred to Tevis, however, that before the turn of the tide it might be possible to dam up the leak so as greatly to lessen the flooding below decks. The thought must have come to Flamel or MacLaren at about the same time, for a little later he saw them at work with canvas, ropes and planks, stanching the gaping wound in the vessel's side. Yokio, too, was bearing a hand.

Tevis looked to see if Mrs. Thrale did not take an interest in this important work, but she sat

motionless in the bow, gazing out to sea, as though she expected to catch a vision of the Captain out there where he had gone down in the tidal flood.

But these were all merely glances aside on his part, for he kept his eyes upon the gulch, strainedly peering through the glass from time to time, and not a shadow shifted ashore nor a buzzard flew that he did not see it. Once or twice a moving object dodged among the mesquits, and each time he sprang up, alert and anxious, but it was never anything more suspicious than a coyote or a jack-rabbit.

As the sun was dropping below the buttes he heard a movement inside the wheelhouse. The door opened, and Hazel's face appeared. She seemed fresher after her rest, and her dark eyes gleamed brightly.

"Oh," said she, "I didn't know I was to have an armed sentinel while I slept. Is there so much danger as that? This part of the island appears to be wholly deserted."

"It is," said he, reassuringly. "My presence here is only a matter of form. We have to keep anchor watch, and we're very short-handed."

"Yes, I know," she sighed. "Yokio told me all about our losses when he brought the tea. Poor Mrs. Thrale! Had I been able, I should have gone to her and tried to comfort her. Where is she?"

"She's away up forward," he said. "You mustn't try to see her now. Wait until you are better."

“But I am better. I feel quite refreshed. I must go and see her.” And she passed bare-headed along deck, the last glints of the fading sunlight weaving an aureole in her hair, and the red wrapper fluttering in the breeze. She made her way down the companion and up the slanting deck to where the silent woman sat in the grief of her new widowhood. She put her hand gently upon Mrs. Thrale’s shoulder and the desolate woman turned slowly and looked at her out of grief-softened eyes.

Glancing toward them again a little later, Tevis saw that they were talking together as two women in their isolated position must talk, no matter what of misfortune or of sadness may have come to one of them. It was plain that, by the sweet sympathy of Hazel, the desolate woman had been led away from her dismal abstraction, and when, as the shadows of the buttes lay over the cove, they came up to the bridge together for a word with him, he could see that Mrs. Thrale was no longer the sea hawk, but a woman chastened by sorrow and contrition.

“Now, if you’ll go in there and sit down, Mrs. Thrale,” said Hazel after he had answered some questions put by the bereaved woman as to their situation, “I’ll fetch you a cup of tea.”

“Thank you, Miss Braisted,” said Mrs. Thrale. “You’re awfully kind, and I don’t want to make you any trouble; but the tea would taste good. I’m—I’m so——” and she fell to sobbing, leaning

upon Hazel's shoulder and clinging to her while she led her into the wheelhouse.

While Hazel went below for the tea, Mrs. Thrale wiped her eyes with her handkerchief and looking out at Tevis said, with great earnestness:

"Did you see the Captain after I took the wheel? Was he very mad at me? I know I jawed him—I was always jawing him, and he was such a kind, patient man. But he wasn't mad—he wasn't *very* mad, was he?"

It was clear that a little deception was due from him, and he hastened to assure her that he had seen no great anger on the Captain's part—he had probably felt that she was doing what she thought was best when she took the wheel.

"He couldn't have died cursing me, could he?" she cried appealingly. "He couldn't—could he? He was a good man, and a good captain. I knew him since I was that high. We went to school together in the old stone schoolhouse near where I was born. It's true I was always jawing him, but he understood—he knew it was only my way."

Having found her tongue through the well-meant influence of Hazel, the contrite woman kept on in a flood of self-reproach and self-vindication, mingled with pitiful praise of her dead husband. But when she had drank the tea which Hazel brought up to her, her frayed nerves seemed to knit themselves up a little, and she was led more easily to the consideration of affairs aboard ship—the condition of the flooded cabins below deck and

other matters which Hazel brought forward to keep her mind off the Captain. Tevis was relieved when he heard her say:

"Where's Mr. Flamel? I want to know about the things in my room."

"I'll go with you," said Hazel. And they went below, Mrs. Thrale leaning upon the girl for support, as they passed down.

While they were below Walden came up on deck, bearing in his face the look of a man just recovering from a debauch.

"I say," he called up to Tevis, "what kind of a rotten hole are we in now? We're stuck here, I fancy."

"You've guessed it right the first time," was the cool reply, coupled with a frankly disdainful look out of the young man's eyes.

"Tevis, you're a good sort. Hunt me up a weed or a pipe. I can't find one anywhere, and the Jap won't come when I ring."

"Hunt it up yourself," said Tevis, striding to the other end of the bridge and gazing carefully ashore.

Walden went away grumbling. Just then Tevis saw something moving in the mesquits. It was the skulking figure of a man—a loose-clothed figure that instantly suggested a Chinaman. The shadows were deepening ashore, but he made him out plainly enough through the glass; and while he stood staring, uncertain whether to send a shot after him or not, two other men appeared behind a

mesquit, only their bare heads showing, for they had removed the big peak hats which would have made them conspicuous objects. They stood there, gazing at the yacht a good fifteen minutes, evidently taking careful note of everything they could see aboard. Presently they turned and trotted back up the gulch. Whether these three Mongols were an advance guard of the men who had gone ashore on the opposite side of the island, Tevis could only guess.

Reflecting a moment upon this sudden appearance of the hostile hatchetmen, it seemed plain to him that, having lost their boats, and being anxious to keep out of the way of the marines, the highbinders had all traversed the island, thinking to discover means by which to cross the strait to the mainland. From the fact that those whom he had seen had no rifles, he argued that they had left them aboard the junks in the wild scramble for shore when the men from the gunboat attacked them. No doubt they still had their hatchets in their belts and probably revolvers; so that, considering their large number, they were very dangerous foemen. In their eagerness to cross to the mainland, they would not hesitate to attack and loot the yacht, particularly as the lack of men for its defense must be clear to them. They would doubtless come on in full force in the night or in the early morning when the tide would be low again, and the thought of what would ensue made Tevis catch his breath, while the hands that

clasped his rifle, closed upon it with gripping fingers.

Flamel and his two helpers had just finished their work, and had come on deck. He hurried over to them and hastily reported what he had seen.

"It doesn't surprise me," said Flamel. "They're mighty anxious to get away from this island. The Seris have probably been paying their respects to them. Indians hate Chinamen, and would fight those chaps in a minute. Besides the marines have no doubt smashed their small boats and sent the junks down to Guaymas. We've got to get busy, shipmates, and strengthen our position. We'd better tear down some of the upper works and build a barricade amidships. We can stand 'em off for a few hours anyway."

"And then?" said MacLaren anxiously.

"And then it's all up with the gang of us, I guess, unless the sea goes down and we can make away in the launch." He glanced out upon the turbulent stretch of the strait, where the gale still blew and the sea rose wild and high.

"Nothing doing there," he said despairingly. "We've got to fight it out right here, and do the best we can. Yokio, run and bring the axes."

The Jap hastened away. Tevis saw Mrs. Thrale coming up the companion with Hazel. Flamel went over to meet them, and set forth the miserable situation. While they were talking he took MacLaren up to the bridge.

"Is there much water in the engine-room now?" he asked eagerly.

"A little," replied the engineer.

"Could it be pumped out?"

"Yes, if we had time. What for?"

"I want to get the dynamo started."

"But we don't need any lights now. They'd only attract attention."

"I know, but this is for a different purpose."

"What's that?" asked MacLaren curiously.

"Live wires—I want to run four or five all around the ship—along the rails and above them, and along the sides."

"Great!" said the Scotchman, slapping his thigh. "A guid scheme, I call it. But you don't need anything more than the winch engine for that. It's got a separate boiler, you know. I could fire that little thing up in an hour, and have your deenamos spinnin'."

Flamel appeared, with a couple of axes.

"I've had to tell the ladies," he said. "Miss Braisted takes it coolly enough, but the old woman has gone all to pieces. Wouldn't have told her, if I'd thought she was so shaky. Her nerve seems to be *non est*. I've told the Englishman, too, and he's braced up and promised to help, though I don't rely much on him. Hear the Jap chopping? Some of that expensive woodwork has got to suffer."

Tevis told him his plan of the live wires.

"Bully!" said he. "Just the thing! Maybe

we'll get out of this fix yet—that is, if they don't cut the wires with their hatchets."

"I've thought of that," said Tevis, "and if you'll let me have some of that planking you're cutting out, a dozen good tight casks and some of the grating from the boiler room, I'll rig up a surprise for 'em when they try to get aboard."

"What's that?" asked Flamel interested.

"A float, with the grating on top, charged with a good, stiff voltage. We'll moor it against the side nearest shore. They're bound to get up on it, in climbing aboard, and if they wade out in their bare feet or if their wet shoes come in contact with it, a good many of them will lose interest in the yacht all of a sudden."

"Hooray!" exclaimed Flamel. "All hands at work on the float—that is, Sir Charles, Yokio and I. You and Mac better get the dynamo to running."

While the engineer was firing up the small engine Tevis got out several coils of copper wire, and some strips of dunnage, on which to string the "juice lines" along and above the rail. He was wiring the strips upright to the rail stanchions, and working hurriedly with his pliers and cutter, when Hazel came over and said pleadingly:

"Can't I help? Let me do something, won't you? Mr. Flamel told me what you were doing. It's a splendid plan. I don't see how it can fail to keep them off."

"Yes, you can help," he said, gladly, "I should have some one to stretch wire with me."

She obeyed each order promptly and with surprising sagacity. After three wires had been run on little poles, which extended two feet above and below the rail all around the yacht, he uncoiled two strands of loose wire to be thrown over the side later, one of them to hang down six or seven feet below the deck, and the other a little above it. This would give five wires, each to make a separate electric circuit, so that if any one of them were cut, the disconnection would not break the current on the others.

"It's splendid," said Hazel, when the wires were all strung and the float, with its thin layer of grating was moored alongside and was riding neatly on the incoming tide. "It's just grand to think we can call electricity to our protection in this wild place. But we couldn't have done it without you, Mr. Tevis."

"Edwin, you mean," said he with a smile.

"Well, Edwin," said she, speaking the name shyly and very low. "Can I help you any more, Edwin?"

"Not just now. Mrs. Thrale needs you, doesn't she?"

"Yes; she's still up in the bow. I can't keep her away from that horrid, exposed place. She'll take her death of cold."

"Yes; and it's too exposed in another way," he said, significantly. "You'd both better go to my

room. Tell her she must go—that the Captain would want her to do it if he were here. It's on the starboard side, away from shore and it's the only dry one outside the crew's quarters. I'll ask Yokio to help you get her down there. I've got to go and look after the dynamo."

"Very well; but I'm going to be of some use afterward. See, I have that revolver you gave me," and she brought forth the weapon from the pocket of her blouse.

"That's right," he said, smiling.

He ran below, and when the dynamo was actually whirring and the wires and the grating were all connected up and tested, he felt the first feeling of relief that had come to him since he had seen the hatchetmen in the gulch.

CHAPTER XXV

AN ELECTRICAL SURPRISE

IT WAS about three in the morning that the attack was made.

As Tevis had anticipated, the hatchetmen did not wait for the ebbing tide to leave the stranded yacht high upon the spit. They waded out from shore, coming on in such a body as to present a terrifying appearance to the little armed company of three men, a Jap boy and one plucky girl, who could not be persuaded to leave the barricade and go below, though Tevis tried to make her believe that Mrs. Thrale, now in his room, was in dire need of her.

They were only three men, because MacLaren, though he was eager to join them, had to attend to the engine. As the dynamo required but little care, Tevis had entrusted him with it, so that he himself should be able to handle one of the shot-guns, Sir Charles, Yokio and Hazel having the others, and Flamel the rifle. Besides these weapons, each had a revolver, and, taking a hint from the hatchetmen's hand-to-hand method of attack, they also kept the axes ready at hand.

When the dark figures stole through the mes-

quits, over the white dunes and down to the water's edge, Flamel waited no longer but opened fire upon them with the rifle. The range was too wide as yet for the fowling pieces, though all were loaded with buckshot. Flamel's fire, which was strangely and disappointingly ineffective, was not returned. In the starlight they saw with satisfaction that there were only two or three long-barreled weapons among the attacking foe. The Mongols must have left most of their rifles aboard the confiscated junks.

One of the highbinders fell just as he stepped into the water, but the others kept on, with a superficial show of courage, yelling and gabbling, all doubtless highly heartened by the fact that so few shots were sent their way. In truth, from the firing, it would have been easy to argue there was only one man left aboard, though they may have seen the others earlier in the night. Not a light shone from the shoreward side of the yacht, and that, too, added to the deserted look of the craft. It was clear that the Mongols expected an easy victory. They had but to wade out to the vessel, clamber aboard, overpower the inferior guard, and the ship was theirs.

So they came trooping into the water, and even when the yelling vanguard had waded out within a hundred feet of the vessel and the buckshot began to sing past their heads, or splash about them, they faltered for a moment only, then returned the fire with sharp insistence, and made directly for

the float, upon which they climbed confidently until it swarmed with the chattering creatures.

Now was the moment for the electrical surprise, and, full of the excitement of the act, Tevis pressed the button; but, peering over the barricade, he saw no change in the position of the group on the float, and no wild yells of pain and terror rang out from them.

"What's the matter with your current?" cried Flamel.

"I don't know," he called back despairingly, pressing the button tightly and looking down to where the hatchetmen were climbing up over their comrades' backs, and grasping the rail regardless of the wires in which they were in close contact. But the copper strands, so carefully strung, were dead and utterly harmless to the hostile boarders.

The failure of his electrical system of defence dazed Tevis. In a moment the black meaning of it forced itself upon him, overwhelming his latent sense of hope in the situation. He looked along behind the barricades and saw Hazel reloading her revolver. At the sight of her he shivered and cried low to his sickening heart:

"God! What will become of her?" He sprang to her side.

"It won't work?" she said, looking at him out of eyes that were like a terrified fawn's. "That's too bad!"

"It's worse than bad!" he said desperately. "It's——" He caught himself. He must not give

way like this. She must not see that a feeling of panic had come to him because of his failure.

Quickly and resolutely he reloaded his gun and, standing closely by her side—so closely that he could feel the brush of her sleeve against his and the soft arm within it, he fired shot after shot among the Mongols, some of whom were already up to the deck and climbing over the rail. All of the yacht's defenders kept up their fire, but though the range was short the aim was hasty and nervous and only a few of the reckless boarders fell back into the sea.

When he saw the loose-bloused, chattering Asiatics swarm aboard and knew that the tide of battle was against the handful of fighters on the deck, Tevis, in a clamoring fear for Hazel's safety, threw his arm about her waist, and crying "Come, come! You must be out of this!" half-dragged, half-carried her below to his own room, bundled her in with the excited Mrs. Thrane and locked the door on the outside, taking the key with him.

"That's good!" said Sir Charles, going along the passage with a big revolver in his hand. "I'll stay down here and guard them.

"Oh, you're very dependable!" said Tevis, who placed little reliance upon the man as a sentinel, and feeling that he could do better service on deck if he had dared to stay there. He ran up to the deck and along to the barricade, where he saw Flamel and Yokio in hand-to-hand battles with

the hatchetmen, the first officer swinging his axe neatly while he glanced at him.

"Did you take the girl below?" shouted Flamel to Tevis as he reappeared at the barricade. "That' right."

And Tevis knew that the man's heart was glad she was out of immediate danger.

Yokio was shrieking a Japanese battle song, and stood with his back to the deckhouse, valiantly brandishing his axe against the ancient foemen of his race. There were at least ten of the hatchetmen now on deck, and others were climbing up. He reloaded his revolver and sprang to the top of the barricade, intent upon keeping back as many of the boarders as possible, but ready at any moment to hasten to the saloon companion and make a final stand before Hazel's door, with such aid as he could get from Sir Charles.

But the instant he leaped upon the barricade he saw a strange and wonderful sight: The men who were climbing aboard all tottered back, their hands and arms working spasmodically, while the air was rent by wild shrieks of torment and dismay. Whenever they touched the wires they fell like ripe fruit into the water, splashing and yelling and scrambling shoreward. *The current was on!*

He rushed to the button knob connected with the float wires, pressed it tightly and instantly a chorus of tumultuous yells resounded from the float. Looking down, he saw the hatchetmen leap from the heavily charged grating, while those who had

their hands upon it ready to clamber up, fell back into the water. A few seemed to be unable to separate themselves from the charged metal, and these howled and shrieked louder than the rest.

But still the pirates already aboard fought on. Dropping the button knob and turning to them, Tevis devoted himself to two Mongols who had that moment set upon Flamel. One of the boarders had just rushed in behind his back, when Tevis fired at him. The bullet whizzed past the Chinaman's breast, and in the same instant he brought his hatchet down with a swoop that sent it crashing through Flamel's skull and the brave seaman dropped limply to the deck. It was a sight that turned Tevis' blood cold; but he mastered himself and sent the slayer down with a bullet in his head, while Yokio, having felled his man, rushed up to the top of the barricade.

This was a lucky move for Tevis, for two panting hatchetmen were hacking at his head, and the Jap's smartly wielded axe stood him in good stead. There was a clash of steel on steel as the axe met the hatchets, and the sickening sallies were punctuated by shots from Tevis' revolver. It was a hard fight, but between them they put the two Mongols to flight, which was the easier done because they were becoming dismayed by the agonized yells and the falling-back of their electrified fellows, many of whom were already ashore and running up the gulch. In five minutes the deck was deserted by the last of the boarders.

Tevís hastened to where Flamel lay gasping his last. The stricken man did not open his eyes nor utter a word, but passed away quietly, and, as it seemed, with little pain.

Tevís reloaded the rifle and sent shot after avenging shot among the fleeing hatchetmen. The last of them splashed ashore while others dodged in among the mesquits.

"They gone!" cried Yokio, "All gone! We have disappeared them!"

Then he and Tevís lifted Flamel's body gently and bore it forward where they laid it sadly upon the bunk in the dead man's own room. As they turned to go, Tevís saw tears in Yokio's eyes.

"Missa Flamel vay good mans. I am so misfortunate he die. My heart so sorrowful. But we have disappeared all the Chinamens. Look, see!"

He pointed to where the last of the repelled boarders was fleeing up the gulch.

"They thinking devils on the ship. But I am understanding—it is electric what you do, and very wonderful, very wonderful; but I am understanding."

Looking down at the float with a feeling of triumph in his heart, Tevís saw no one on or about it. The moment he had dropped the button knob the current had been disconnected from the grating, and as the shocks had been far from deadly, all the Mongols had managed to get away. He could well imagine the mysterious, prickly, burning sensations and the violent contortions they had

undergone when the current was on, and he felt sure that the hatchetmen would not care to repeat the experience of trying to board the bedeviled ship.

“Weel,” said MacLaren, coming up from below, his face agrin. “It wurrked all right except that time when the deenamo wouldn’t buzz. But it drove them awa’—it drove them awa’, and they’ll nae coom back again.”

The Scotchman was much distressed when he learned of the death of Flamel and stood about looking very thoughtful for a while.

In the graying light of dawn they cleared the deck of the dead hatchetmen by the simple process of dropping the bodies into the sea. While they were doing this Sir Charles came around the corner of the afterhouse, his pistol in his hand.

“Are they all gone?” he asked anxiously.

“Yes,” said Tevis, curtly, “and here’s a job for you.” He pointed to the blood that lay upon the deck near the barricade. “You couldn’t fight, and you’ve got to do something; so just help Yokio clean up this mess, before the women come up. In other words, right away.”

“Just fancy!” said the baronet, his lip curling.

“Get to work,” cried Tevis hotly, “or overboard you go!”

“That’s right,” said MacLaren, “and I’ll help you do it.”

“But, I say, Tevis, you’re not mawster here,”

whined Walden. "You're doing this just because you don't like me—you're an American and——"

Yokio had brought the pails and scrubbing brushes. Tevis thrust a brush into Walden's unwilling hand, and said:

"You're altogether wrong. I *do* like Englishmen. They are a brave race, but you disgrace them. And no matter who's master, or who isn't, if you won't fight, you *must* work, or over the side you go. The water isn't deep and you can wade ashore and get acquainted with the hatchetmen from whom you ran away. Here, take this brush!"

He took it, and the novel spectacle of an idle aristocrat performing a useful and salutary service was so engaging and arresting a spectacle that Tevis fain would have stayed to enjoy it; but he had to go and tell the good news of their victory to Hazel—a joy that was tempered by the sad thought of the untoward taking-off of Flamel, whose friendly hand-grip he would feel no more.

"They're actually beaten off?" she repeated half incredulously when he told her. "And the electricity worked after all? Oh, good! good! It was your plan and such a fine one. You have saved us!"

Then he told her about Flamel's death.

"Oh, the poor man!" she cried. "He was such a good man, too—such a gentleman. I'm so—so sorry." A tear stood in her eye as she spoke.

For Flamel's sake Tevis was glad of that tear.

He hoped that the soul of the man who had silently, stoically loved her, still lingered about them and could see this glistening testimony to her grief for him.

CHAPTER XXVI

GOOD-BYE TO THE YACHT

WHEN, two days after the repulse of the hatchet-men, the surge of the sea outside abated and the air was clear and calm over the strait, they made the launch ready, stowing aboard enough food, fresh water, blankets, and extra tins of gasoline to last them for the voyage to Guaymas.

Hazel, Sir Charles and Yokio took their places in the stout boat which had been roofed over in a snug fashion with tarpaulin. MacLaren and Tevis carried Mrs. Thrale aboard and laid her on a couch they had prepared for her of rich soft blankets and traveling rugs, well forward under the awning. The poor woman had drooped and faded steadily from the hour of the loss of her husband. She had talked about him continuously, consuming the remnant of her energy in this vocal exercise. She had not slept, she had eaten little, but she had talked, talked. It was chiefly about the pearls, which were in the bag fastened under her skirt. She also had insisted on taking aboard the launch her cat, a basket of elderberry wine and other things that were dear to her. Although she seemed

to extract a modicum of comfort from Hazel's devoted attention to her, she was so much the worse for nervous wear that Tevis almost despaired of getting her to Guaymas alive. But he thought that once there she might rally under medical treatment. She was much affected by their departure from the yacht, and was uncommonly full of self-reproach.

"There," she said to Hazel, in a thin, tired voice as they laid her down aboard the launch and she waved her bony hand toward the yacht. "There's the boat I lost for you. She was yours—all yours—and now look at her! No wrecker would ever think of trying to float her again. They couldn't get to her. She'll go to pieces there in the spring tides, and she'll rot and rust and the sand will wash over her. That beautiful yacht!"

"Never mind," said Hazel, "I'm only too glad to get away from her now. I'm going home—I'm going to my father. Don't worry about me or the yacht. Just lie down and rest and we'll be down to Guaymas and the doctor's to-morrow."

"Doctor's?" sighed the sick woman wearily. "Doctors can't do anything for me. I'll never get there, anyway."

"Oh, yes; you will," said the girl cheerily. "You'll get there and they'll make you well again."

They were rounding the lower headland, and rocking in the swift downward tide. Looking back Tevis saw the dismantled yacht, her white side

gleaming in the morning sun and broad-winged seabirds circling about her.

"That's the last we'll see of her," said MacLaren, thoughtfully. "She was a bonny boat. Too bad to let those engines bide there and go to rack on the spit. That's the last we'll see of her."

Hazel winced as he said the words. Tevis knew that she felt very keenly the loss of the beautiful craft.

"Poor old *Thetis!*" was all she said. "Poor old *Thetis!*"

They ran down the strait, keeping a sharp lookout for rocks and bad water. But though the spray rained upon the awning at times, they sped out into the open bay below without further misadventure. There the sea was smooth, the wind was light and, southward over the bow, the open gulf looked inviting.

But just as they were rounding the lower coast of Tiburon, they saw, close inshore, the dull outline of the gunboat. She was lying-to, and the smoke was drifting lazily from her funnels. She was a good two miles away and they devoutly hoped that she had not sighted them.

"What's she doing there?" asked Tevis, turning to MacLaren.

"Oh, just lying about at the mouth of the strait on the chance of the yacht coming doon."

"Then she probably ran down there looking for us immediately after we got out of her clutches

up at the Boca Inferno," said he. "Do you suppose she has seen us?"

"No; but she will if we keep on this course, for we'll open out to her. Best thing to do under the circumstances is to make westward a bit."

"Toward that land over there?" said Tevis, pointing to a barren-looking piece of gray-white upland that rose like a frosted-cake out of the gulf. "Let's see. What is the place anyway?" He had brought along a small chart of the Gulf, which he unrolled across his knees. "San Esteban. It's a small island of the Difficult Group."

"Another nasty island?" broke out Walden impatiently. "I say, we don't want any more islands."

"You see how that head shuts us off from the gunboat," said MacLaren, as they began to lose sight of the *General Torres*. "If she hasn't picked us up, we can run in over there at San Esteban and lay low until she gets tired waiting for the yacht that will never come, and then steam away from these parts. It will be a dour wait for all us now, we're sae sair to get into poort, but we must do it. We mayn't have to bide there lang."

So they ran inshore at San Esteban and moored the launch by long lines in a shallow cove. They made a shelter for Mrs. Thrale with the tarpaulin and a bed of chaparral covered with the few dry blankets they had. They also made another shelter for Hazel close by and spread the damp blankets out to dry upon the sand.

They took turns watching for the gunboat from a head of land where they had a plain view of the mouth of the strait and of the place where the Mexican lay. Though they could not actually see her from their lookout station, sometimes her smoke drifted into view around the point. It was plain that she had not observed them when they were in range of her. Though this seemed almost incredible, it was probably due to the stupidity of her watch. But it would have been a sheer impossibility to have escaped being picked up and run down by her had they kept on their course down the Gulf toward Guaymas. They were safe now, and though the wait was an irritating one, their only hope of keeping out of her grasp was in remaining where they were.

As they sat around the campfire that evening, eating canned beans which Yokio had warmed in the frying pan, Sir Charles, to whom the rough service was most discomfoting, took his tin plate with a sigh.

"These beans are very appetizing," remarked MacLaren, as he helped himself again out of the pan.

"Glad you think so," said Walden. "But I wouldn't mind slipping into a dinner jacket just about now, and sitting down to a grilled bone at the Lions' Club."

"A grilled bone?" cried Hazel, passing her plate to Tevis who was nearest the pan. "Oh, you sybarite!" Though her words were the

merest banter, Tevis detected a strong note of impatience in them. "Yokio," she said to the boy, "will you toast some crackers for Mrs. Thrale? Maybe she would eat one or two. And I'll make some tea. Anybody else have tea?"

"Tea!" protested MacLaren, glancing at Sir Charles meaningly, "that's althegither too common. Nothing but champagne for me. I always have it on ice when I'm camping on a desert island. But excuse me; I'll have to get back to watch." He seized a big bean sandwich and made off for the lookout station.

"I caught his drift," grumbled Walden, looking contemptuously after the engineer. "But fancy a man being satisfied with this sort of dinner, when——"

"Pardon me," interrupted Hazel, her eyes flashing dangerously, "but permit me to remind you, Sir Charles, that it's the best we have just now. And I don't mind saying, in the presence of Mr. Tevis, that your strictures have become very wearisome."

"I like that," returned the baronet. "I fancy you would make no complaint about Mr. Tevis' strictures."

"He is too considerate to utter any," said Hazel quickly.

"What a paragon of manly virtue, indeed," sneered Sir Charles.

Mrs. Thrale moaned from her couch and called

to Hazel. The girl rose instantly and hastened to her side.

“Well, by Jove,” said Walden. “Everybody seems to take pleasure in having a shy at me. Just fancy!”

“Permit me to suggest a remedy,” said Tevis. “Be decent or half-way decent, till we get to Guaymas. If you’re not, you can expect anything, even to being marooned on this island.”

Walden shook his head, but was quite civil for an hour or so, during which he sipped brandy-and-water from a tin cup and then hovered moodily over the campfire, for the night air was chill.

Hazel came back from Mrs. Thrall’s couch and beckoned Tevis apart to say:

“I don’t know what is the matter with her. She doesn’t complain of any pain, but she’s very low. She mumbles a great deal to herself and seems to be out of her head. She won’t eat or drink. I thought she might take some of her elderberry wine—she always says it’s so good for her—and I tried to get her to drink a little but she wouldn’t take a drop. What can we do for her?”

Tevis went with her to the sick woman’s couch. The firelight shone through the opening at the end of the little tent and played mercilessly upon the drawn cheeks and the hollow eyes. The hand, which lay upon the blanket, twitched and turned constantly.

“Are you cold, Mrs. Thrall?” he asked. “Do you want more blankets over you?”

"I have hot water bottles at her feet," said the girl nurse, thoughtfully, "but maybe——"

"They shan't catch me! They shan't get my pearls!" cried the woman, starting up with staring eyes. Let me get hold of that wheel! I'll show them thieving greasers! I'll show 'em a clean pair of heels. And the Chinamen—they—— Oh, Jim! I didn't mean it—I didn't mean to kill you! I was only—trying—to save—my pearls!"

"See," said Hazel. "Isn't it terrible? What can we do for her? I have some quinine—shall I give it to her?"

"It won't do any harm," said he, as he laid his hand on the sick woman's forehead. "She's a bit feverish."

"Is that you, Jim?" she cried, her eyes staring again as he touched her brow. "No," she said sadly. "It's only Tevis; but he'll take good care of me. I know he will."

"Oh, she isn't so bad," he whispered hopefully to Hazel. "She knows us." He tried to quiet her by smoothing her forehead and wrists with his cool hand. She settled down after a while and he was much relieved to see her close her eyes and begin to breathe regularly. Hazel remained with her, while he went to help Yokio gather driftwood for the fire, which was burning low. Sir Charles' hands were outspread above the coals.

"Why don't you go and help them gather wood?" Tevis heard Hazel call to Walden after

he and the Jap had started. "The work would warm you."

"But I say," he said shivering, "I don't know where to look for the nasty wood."

She said no more, but Tevis could well imagine her thoughts. When he and Yokio returned, dragging the drift stuff along the beach, Walden had left the fire and gone to his couch.

"Now," said Tevis to Hazel, "you go and get a good night's rest, and I'll look after her."

She protested that she was not tired and tried to induce him to sleep while she kept watch by Mrs. Thrale; but at last he persuaded her to retire. She went away, but returned soon afterward with a small red blanket wrapped about her and went over to the fire before which she shivered and rubbed her hands.

"What's the matter?" he asked, going over to her.

"Nothing, only I can't find the blankets; that is, only this little thin one."

"Why, they're here, somewhere," he said, looking about, "plenty of them." He went over to where Yokio lay on the sand under an old overcoat. "He hasn't taken any," he said, "and he must be cold, too."

He found none of the missing covers until he went over to the place where Walden was sleeping soundly under a heaped-up mound of bed-clothing. Angered by the sight, he stripped two blankets from the baronet, still leaving a good-sized

pile, and carried them over to her couch. Then he tore another off the comfortable sleeper and folded it over Yokio. The girl's eyes had followed him and she knew as well as he that the luxurious gentleman had gathered up all the bed-clothing he could find for his own couch, without thought of the comfort of the others.

“Good-night!” said Hazel to Tevis, holding out her hand. “And be sure to call me at midnight, so I may share the watch with you.”

Her tone was so soft and there was so little of the conventional in her appearance before the fire—she looked like a gypsy maid in the red blanket—that he felt the vantage ground of their remoteness there on that lonely isle under the stars, and he retained the hand she held out, while she smiled up at him in the fireshine, and did not snatch it from him until Mrs. Thrale piped feebly from her tent.

“Good-night!” he said and turned away at the call of his helpless charge. But Mrs. Thrale's cry was merely one of delirium. She settled down to sleep presently, and he went and sat by the fire which was near at hand and not so far from Hazel's bower but that he could hear her turn on her crackly chaparral couch.

Sometimes his patient would moan pitifully in her sleep and when he went to her she would begin the tragedy over again. Then she would go away back to her village life, and she and the Captain would be school chums together, the two of them

riding on the old gray horse, or picking apples or wading in the creek. Or they would be going to a dance or leaning over the gate and talking low in the twilight. It was all very heart-touching, like looking into the musty old love-letters of a long-dead village spinster.

He was not obedient to his promise to call Hazel at midnight to alternate with him in the care of Mrs. Thrane. Indeed it was after one o'clock when he moved gently through the mesquits over to the girl's couch to awaken her. He found her lying peacefully, with one arm under her head, her white face charmingly soft and sweet in the firelight, in striking relief against a Bagdad pillow. A heavy braid of dark hair lay upon her softly heaving breast, and fluffy wisps of it drooped over her forehead. Never had he seen so winsome a picture of young womanhood as that of this girl whom he loved, lying there alone in her innocence and in the beauty God had given her.

And there beyond the range of the firelight he could see, faintly looming among the mesquits, the blackly shadowed form of another sleeper—the man to whom she had promised herself. That dark form, though heavy in sleep, interposed itself coldly and harshly between him and this sweet girl lying at his feet. And yet he was so wrapt about in the precious, implacable coil of love that he tingled in every fibre as he shyly peered into the nun-like seclusion in which her girlish slumber begirt her. At no moment of all that season of

desperate love had he felt so shut away from her as now. This feeling came to him out of the lonely, pervasive moan of the surf as it beat upon the rocks outside the little cove. The sea had given to him the little of her that he had enjoyed, and the sea would take it away. At the furthest they would not be remaining upon the island but a few days more, and soon after that she would be gone out of his life.

He looked up at the cold, pitiless stars whose scintillant rays laughed at his love, and as the chilly night breeze blew about him he shivered. But—he wondered at himself as he did it, though he did not blame himself for the transgression—he drew nearer and nearer to her and at last bent down over her with the thought that he would waken her by a touch of the shoulder; for to speak to her might be to arouse the sick woman.

As he kneeled to touch her a gently suffused glow came up from the sea, softly illuminating and divinely hallowing the face of the girl over whom he bent. No, he could not awaken her just then—he could not break in upon that sacred sleep. The glow upon the sea strengthened as he knelt there. On wave-tips to the skies ran a trail of liquid light higher yet paler than his pulsing heart's desire when the large moon lit the fall and rise of her full bosom. He would not own to himself the lupine nature of his act in invading the sanctity of her sleep. It could not be himself—not Edwin Tevis—who, with clamoring pulses, bent

lower and lower over her soft round face until his lips touched hers. But in the instant of that ravishing contact his ego awoke. It was himself—no other—who was kissing those full, soft lips and was breathing the warm breath of this woman whom he loved.

The girl turned gently, with a sleepy sigh, and then resumed her regular breath. He started back. Quickly, silently he rose, and softly as a shadow he moved away, every pulse athrob, every vein full of the fire of love. No matter what might happen after that, he had, in a sense, possessed her. For that moment she had been his. Though he lived a hundred years—though he died on the morrow—his soul could never forget it.

He did not reprove himself for his trespass. He felt that he should be ashamed to have so taken advantage of her helpless unconsciousness, but somehow he was not. As a verity, with the soft feel of her lips still upon his, he was glad of what he had done. The moonlit sea was the brighter, the night the more beautiful and the whole horizon the wider.

Mrs. Thrale did not awake. He heard her cat mewing about her couch, but the noise did not disturb her. The lonely animal went over to Hazel and mewed and purred about her and must have aroused her, for presently he heard her footfall among the dry weeds and saw her coming over to the fire with the cat in her arms—a splash of white against the dark blanket that draped her about.

“Why didn’t you wake me at twelve?” she whispered to him impatiently. “It’s almost morning and you’ve been up in the cold all this time.”

He threw more branches on the fire, and it blazed up brightly.

“I have been comfortable,” said he, “and not unhappy.”

“Has she slept any? I heard her going on. Poor thing! She’s quiet now. Perhaps all she needs is rest.”

She went over to the sick woman’s couch, while Tevis, sprawling down by the campfire and pulling a piece of canvas over him, stretched himself out upon his back, his eyes to the stars. But he did not sleep.

She came back to the fireside and as he sat up expectantly, she said:

“Why don’t you lie still and rest? She’s sleeping very quietly now. If only she could sleep all day and keep from talking, I’m sure she’d be better. But I think she is improving anyway. She may be up and about in the morning.”

“I hope so,” said he, looking at her with that rapturous feel of her lips still upon him. How beautiful she looked there in the moonlight!

“Why don’t you lie down and rest?” she repeated in a tone of concern. “You must be tired.”

“Because”—he took a dry stick and threw it on the fire and it flared up suddenly—“because you’ll be lonely without company, even such as I am.”

"Oh, you are the best of company," she said frankly; "but I want you to go to sleep."

"How can I sleep when you are so near me now and will soon be so far away?" He gazed at her fondly in the firelight. Her eyelids drooped a little as she said:

"Yes. We have been such—such good friends and shipmates."

"And nothing more?" There was a burning eagerness in his eyes as he looked at her—an eagerness kindled by the kiss.

She saw the look and she trembled a little because of its intensity.

"Go to sleep now!" she commanded.

"Of course," he replied stiffly, "I am still to be held aloof. Good-night!"

His head lay back and the dry chaparral crackled under him. Through the fringe of his eyelashes he looked fondly at her where she sat by the fire, clasping her knees and gazing fixedly into the flame. Her command that he go to sleep had been a virtual forbidding of his pursuit of the subject of love. Did her sense of loyalty to her betrothal pledge and to the promise she had made to her father stand above everything? He knew she was intensely leal. Her unswerving fidelity to the truth in all things had been proven to him in many ways—and although he admitted it in nearly everything, in this one essential thing that stood so stubbornly in the way of his happiness, he selfishly felt that she was wrong. And yet there

had been times when he had thought that she loved him. But when one considered the wholesale international bargain and sale of beauty, love, he reflected bitterly, was a minor matter, easily negligible, out of date. Love! Why if it had counted for anything, would she not already have given him some little encouragement after the appeals he had made to her?

Over and over again these desperate thoughts surged through his hot brain and always there would come as the climax to them the bitter reminder that soon they would leave the island and go forth upon divergent paths—she to one end of the world, he to the other. It was unbearable.

When she arose and went to Mrs. Thrale's couch, he turned upon his blanket and lay face downward, with his head between his hands, pressing hard upon his temples, as if to force out all thoughts of the love that tormented him.

CHAPTER XXVII

MRS. THRALE GOES OUT TO SEA

IN THE morning Mrs. Thrale seemed a little brighter after her night's rest, but in the afternoon, while Walden was on the lookout with Yokio—for Tevis would not trust Sir Charles there alone—and while MacLaren slept and the sun shone so fiercely down upon the tarpaulin that it had to be shifted to shade the sick woman, she began to talk grimly of death.

She was lying with her head propped up that she might look out over the sea. Her delirium had gone, so that, although Tevis tried to thrust the nearing tragedy away from Hazel, he knew and she must have known, that the Captain's widow would soon join her husband. She was letting go her hold upon life from moment to moment; but though her soul seemed willing to depart, her lips held to their old habits of protesting.

"It's too bad!" she said, wearily, looking about the gray waste of the arid island. "I always wanted to be buried in the old South Hill Cemetery, near the Penobscot. There was a hickory tree there in the corner that I often looked at—a beautiful tree, always full of nuts in the fall;

and there was blackberry vines and lots of green grass—oh, *so* green! This is dry—it makes your eyes tired. I always wanted to be buried where the hickory nuts would fall upon my grave.” It was the dominant passion, swaying her whole being to the very moment of death—she would be garnering something even in her grave. “And I wanted the Captain by my side. But he’s buried out there in the sea—I suppose the tide brought him down this way—and, as long as we can’t go back to South Hill, you’ll put me in the sea with him, won’t you? Maybe we’ll drift together around to the old Maine coast. Anyway we’ll be in the same sea.”

She smiled a thin, wintry smile. Then she went on, raising her eyes to Hazel.

“And you, my dear girl—you’ve took such good care of me; and I wrecked your yacht. I didn’t mean to do it—you know that—I thought I could run her through all right, but I didn’t. I lost her. Feel in my skirt, dear, and you’ll find the bag. Bring it out, quick; I don’t believe I can stay long.”

Hazel brought out the bag of pearls and laid it by her side. The thin fingers closed over it, as she went on:

“I lost your yacht, my girl. These pearls belong to you. Don’t say ‘no’—they’re yours, all except what’s Mr. Tevis’s and MacLaren’s and what’s coming to Flamel’s widow. They’ll know their shares. If anyone of the crew’s folks makes

a claim, Mr. Tevis can settle it for you. Take it, Hazel. Let me see you take it. I never had a daughter of my own, nor a son either. I ain't got any folks living. The pearls must go to you."

Weeping gently, the girl took the bag in her hand.

"Under my pillow is a little Bible. I want you to take that, Mr. Tevis; keep it to remember me by, and when you put me in the sea read over me the fourteenth chapter of Job. That will do for the Captain, too—he didn't have any funeral. Here is my cat. Poor old Port. He'll miss me. I'll leave him to you, Hazel. And the elderberry wine—there's a half-dozen bottles of it—it's very warming. I give that to you, Edwin Tevis. Now go away, both of you, and let me die here, looking out on the sea alone. He loved the sea and I love it, and I'm going down into it and find him."

Tevis took Hazel by the arm and led her away. They stood a little apart from the death-couch and watched the going forth of this singular woman to the man whom she had loved after her own strange fashion, but in a way to prove that "hearts are hearts the weary world all over." For an hour or more she lay there, her cat upon her breast, looking silently out upon the sea. Then her tired head fell back and they knew that she was no more of earth.

When Walden came down from the lookout station, leaving Yokio on watch, he showed much concern over the death of Mrs. Thrale, and insisted on

knowing what had become of the treasure she had left behind. Hazel told him. He wanted to see the gems. Tevis was not far away when she showed them to him, and he overheard him say:

“By Jove! I had no idea there were so many of them, or such big ones! A string of these will look very fetching on the neck of Lady Walden.”

Hazel bit her lip, and stood with downcast eyes, while she said something the listening man did not hear.

Tevis turned away.

Lady Walden! Lady Walden! The name rang in his ears and kept ringing all the morning. Why had he not the power to snatch her away from the other man before his eyes, and claim her as his own? But there were reasons why she would not be unwilling to hold herself to her vow. Yes, a girl of her station and training would hardly give up becoming Lady Walden. She was, he thought bitterly, only too ready to shine in her set as a woman of title. Now that Sir Charles was beginning to devote himself to her again, just as he doubtless devoted himself in the early stages of their courtship and engagement, she would forget the boorishness of the man, brought out under rough circumstances such as might never surround them again during their married life.

Lady Walden!

They consigned Mrs. Thrale's body to the sea from the end of a rock that jutted out into deep water. Tevis read the chapter from Job, and

Hazel, with faltering voice, said a little prayer. They watched the thin, sheeted form slip into the sea, sinking slowly as it was drawn out by the swift tide.

Then they heard a cry—Yokio yelling from the lookout station:

“Gunboat coming out now—coming zis way, much rapidly!”

They strained their eyes seaward. There was the cruiser at last! She steamed directly toward them until she was well out in the wide channel between the two islands, then she headed north, and in half an hour they saw of her only a low stratum of smoke-drift which spun out to nothingness a little later.

“Now for the boat!” cried MacLaren.

They gathered the luggage together, Tevis bundling it up and the engineer and Yokio wading out to the launch with it.

“Where is the cat?” said Hazel, looking about. “Where’s Port? I’ll have to take him. Here, kit, kit, kit!”

“It’s strange about Port,” said Tevis. “I haven’t seen him since his mistress died.”

“I saw him taking to the copse away over there,” said Walden, “soon after the old woman passed away. Good job, too. We don’t want to be lumbered up with cats.”

An irritated look came into the girl’s eyes. She kept calling and calling to the cat, but he did not come.

"No doubt he wants to stay on this island where she died," said she sadly. "But it's too bad to leave him here all alone in this desert place."

"Well, we're not going to wait on any old cat," declared Sir Charles buckling a Gladstone bag. "What's in that basket?" he asked, looking down interestedly at some carefully wrapped bottles. "Oh, that beastly elderberry wine! I tasted it last night—enough to make one ill, don't you know?"

"It would be better for some persons," observed the blunt MacLaren, coming along and gathering up up the basket, "if nothing stronger was ever made in a' the wurru'd."

It was a wonderfully calm morning, and the blue gulf stretched alluringly away from the gray barren island, affording a broad, clear path back to the civilization so dear to the modern heart. And yet Tevis was loath to go. It would be the end of his voyaging with Hazel, to whom, in her far English home, he would soon become a mere memory: She could not forget him altogether—she would probably think of him at least once a month for the first few years. After that he would recur to her vaguely when she would look at her pearl necklace or hear some one speak of Mexico. She would be among persons of rank and wealth, and it came to him bitterly that his share in the treasure, while it amounted to a goodly sum, would not make him a rich man.

Yes, they were going back to civilization—he to California and she to the other side of the world,

and in all the long miles between them there would be no link to bind her to him.

He saw Walden preparing to go aboard as the luggage was being taken over by MacLaren and the boy, and he looked about drearily. Sir Charles, Hazel and Tevis stood on the beach, Sir Charles close to her side, talking to her in his possessory way.

Tevis gazed at her covertly, with hungry eyes. Never had she seemed so far from him..

Lady Walden!

She looked about the island for the last time, with grave, sweet eyes, and he fancied there was a sorrowful shade on her face when she gazed at the abandoned camp, where the smoke curled from their dying fire.

"Poor Mrs. Thrale!" she sighed, as she glanced at the bag of pearls in her hand. "She gave her life for these."

"Well, they're ours now," said Sir Charles significantly—"that is, most of them, and I fancy we can make better use of them than ever she could."

She still looked thoughtfully at the forsaken camp among the gray-green mesquits while Tevis continued his covert eye-feast of her rare beauty and thought of the love which he must lose forever.

Lady Walden!

"She wouldn't have known what to do with a fortune like this," added Sir Charles. "Her ideas were distinctly vulgar. Come, my dear!" he said,

putting out his arm as if to place it about her waist. "Come, let me carry you out to the boat."

The words were a new blow to the baffled heart of the man who, as if driven from her presence, turned and stood with averted eyes. He took a few steps along the beach and gathered up a roll of blankets. He could not bear to see Walden lay hands upon her. He stared at the abandoned camp and shut his teeth tightly while he thought of what had happened there in the moonlight only the night before. Ah, to have loved so much and to have had so much to renounce!

Lady Walden!

"Do you hear, Hazel?" the brusque voice of Sir Charles demanded. "Can't you stop mooning over that wretched old camp? You ought to be glad to get away from it. Come, come! I'm waiting to carry you out to the boat!"

"One moment!"

Tevis heard a light footfall behind him. He turned swiftly and there was the glorious girl springing toward him. His heart leaped to the pulse of love throbbing so wildly in her quick, animate being and flaming from her eyes. Surprised by the suddenness and dazed by the unreality of her unexpected act, he looked at her uncertainly, incredulously.

"Hazel!" he breathed forth in gasping tones, "you have come to me!"

"What's this?" demanded the astounded Walden. "Come back here at once, Hazel! He's not

going to carry you aboard. I'm the one to do that."

"No!" she cried back to the scowling man. "Here is the one who shall carry me!" She turned to Tevis and stood so closely to him that he felt her warm breath upon his cheek.

His heart swelled in a high and heavenly joyance and his glad arms closed tightly about her.

"Between him and you," she cried, looking disdainfully back at Sir Charles, who still stared at them with unbelieving eyes, "I choose here and now; and if you have the least ray of discernment in your self-loving heart, you will know the reason why."

The bosom of her proud lover heaved exultantly, he lifted her up in his triumphant arms and waded out through the shallows while the low waves swashed gayly about them.

"Dearest," he whispered—"my own, all my own! Is it *true*?"

"Yes, Edwin," she said; "it's true, very true. But don't drop me!"

The bottom was a little rough and he had made a false step. As he caught himself, hugging her the tighter, he said reassuringly:

"Never fear! You are too precious for that!"

He lifted her higher in his strong arms and splashed joyously through the water to the boat, the adorable girl clinging to him closely all the way.

CHAPTER XXVIII

AMID THE ORANGE GROVES

FROM gray little Guaymas, with its grilling heat, its low-roofed adobes, its mantilla-hooded girls, and its bare-legged *niños*, to San Diego, with its orange orchards, its trolley cars and its air of fresh modernity, was a Pullman-car flight of two days, and when Tevis and Hazel arrived in the Californian town there was with them none of those who had left the harbor in the *Thetis* four months before.

At Benson Sir Charles Walden had taken the Santa Fé train for New York, bound for London and "real life," which was something one couldn't find anywhere in America, you know. On the journey up through Sonora he had barely spoken to the lovers, though neither of them had been ungracious to him. He had spent most of his time reading the English papers he borrowed from a fellow-Briton on the train.

At Colton they lost MacLaren and Yokio, who were bound for San Francisco, each with his share of the treasure.

"God bless ye baith," said the ardent Scotch-

man at parting, "and I'd like nothing better than to dance at your wedding. The lass was made for ye, Tevis. Bonny and gentle she is, with a heart as soft as her cheek—and I know ye'll always be happy thegither. Good-bye!"

"Good-bye!" said Yokio. "You going live in South California, then I coming back and maybe you like Japanese boy wait on table. So? Then you be writing when you wanting me come." And he scrawled an address on a scrap of paper.

"Ah," said Hazel when they were left alone on the train, "it is good to have known those people, and to have sailed with them. Please pull down that blind, dear, the sun is so fierce."

"And is it good to have had all those adventures?" he asked, pulling down the blind.

"Yes, really and truly, all except the killing—that was terrible. And to think that such things as we have seen are actually going on in the odd corners of the world, even in this day—men of strange races diving deep into the sea for treasure, fighting over their spoils and sailing away with them, full of triumph! Yes, it seems good to have experienced those bits of brisk living—to have camped on desert islands, to have felt the thrill of the chase, to have seen the rush of the combat, the fierce struggle, the gathering in of the spoils. It gets into one's blood wonderfully, makes one know that one is descended from primal man and that the dream of the world's romance is not over in this day of electricity—even if one carries away

one's loot in a suit case in a Pullman car." And she glanced smilingly down at the bag at her feet.

"I'm afraid you're a romantic enthusiast," said he, wonderfully proud of her very human sentiment.

They laughed together. In fact, it was easy to laugh on this pleasant rail journey, now that they were rid of Sir Charles and his criticisms of everything.

But when they were told at San Diego that, although Mrs. Poindexter and a number of others had gotten safely ashore in the storm, neither Mr. Braisted nor Captain Dumble had ever reached port after the "burning" of the *Thetis*, and that the boat in which they had set out from the yacht had drifted in bottom up, Hazel was full of grief. Her worst fears for her father had proved true. For a time she was not to be comforted. The news which came afterward of the loss of the Braisted millions did not trouble her greatly; but it explained many things and made her sorrow on her father's account the deeper, for she now realized for the first time what he had experienced of harassing care and of stressful strain.

Tevis was not surprised to learn that the underwriters had made no settlement of the yacht's insurance with the distant heirs who had come forward and set up their claim. The payment had been deferred because of some obscure intimations that had been let fall by sailors who had gone ashore from the *Thetis* on the fatal night of the

drowning of Braisted and Dumble, and also because of the conflicting claims of the dead financier's creditors. Tevis and Hazel concluded they would wait until they were married before urging a new claim for insurance based upon the actual loss of the yacht on the shores of Tiburon Island.

Hazel went to New York for a few months on a visit to Mrs. Poindexter, leaving her pearls with Tevis, who sold them in San Francisco for the handy sum of \$85,000.

"We must live in California," she wrote in her first letter. "I want to build one of those quaint Mission houses in the true old hacienda style, among the orange trees, and have a pretty open patio with no end of tropical plants in it and a little fountain. The house must be lined with books and Navajo blankets and soft Mexican serapes and we must have a great open fireplace, where we can sit of evenings and talk, talk, talk, and live our adventures over again. And I want Yokio to wait on table."

He sent her a plan for the house of which she approved and he sat to work immediately to build it in the middle of a Pasadena orange grove.

When she came out from the East and he showed her the house she was rapturously pleased with it.

"And the orange trees," she said, going outside and looking about amid the glistening foliage, "aren't they sweet? Isn't it strange how they bloom and bear fruit at the same time?"

"Yes," he said, "and it's quite fitting that a

romance such as ours should finish with plenty of orange blossoms."

"Finish?" she said, smiling in her old radiant way.

"No, not finish," he corrected, "I mean begin, of course."

After the wedding, which followed in a few days, they went to live in the new house among the orange trees. The honeymoon was spent there, the only thing that presented itself as a diverting circumstance being Tevis' hour-a-day superintendence of the construction of a little electrical laboratory down in an arroyo at the rear of their grounds, screened by shaggy encalytus trees. Here he planned to work out his invention in that ample leisure which he now felt he could well afford.

He had a long, hard fight with the underwriters, who were much concerned at first over the strangely mixed stories of the loss of the *Thetis*; but when it was finally established that the vessel was wrecked and not burned, they settled in full the claim for \$250,000. Though the amount was paid unwillingly, the claim has always seemed a fair one to Tevis, as the yacht was not lost by intent or through any fault of the owner, who was aboard of her at the time of the disaster. Beside there was nothing in the policy to release the company, as there was no clause providing against the peculiar manner in which she was lost.

There was no doubt in Hazel's mind nor in her

husband's as to whom the insurance money belonged, as the transfer of the yacht to her had been made by her father that he might wrest that much out of the wreck of his fortune.

"It shall all go to the creditors," she declared when she received her draft. "It belongs to them, and we have plenty without it."

Some of the Braisted securities turned out better than was expected, and the addition of the quarter-million insurance money helped to make up the deficit in such a way that the loss to the creditors amounted to little after all. But nothing remained to Hazel out of her father's estate. What she now had was wholly the result of her sea adventure. And as she sat with her husband in the *patio*, looking out where the fountain was playing and the leaves were glistening, and Yokio flitted about in his white apron, she insisted that the proceeds from the pearls had always been more his than hers.

"My part in the affair was only passive," she said, "while yours was active."

"But," he protested, "I distinctly remember seeing the figure of a very white-faced young woman behind a barricade, showering buckshot among the invading hatchetmen."

"And shutting her eyes every time she pulled the trigger," she said laughing. "If any of the poor Chinamen were struck by my shot it was the purest accident. And just when they were getting close to us and I couldn't have failed to hit one or

two and establish my reputation as some sort of a heroine, you bundled me away and locked me up with Mrs. Thrale. That strange old creature! She was not so hard and grasping after all. She had a sense of justice."

"Yes—*her* kind of justice," he acknowledged.

"Oh, you needn't breathe a word against Mrs. Thrale," said Hazel. "She was constantly sounding your praises to me. She was quite a match-maker in her funny old way. And after you brought my clothes to me that time in the pilot house, she said——"

"She said?"

"No," said the happy wife, blushing adorably. "I'll not tell you what she said. Yokio is too near. Poor Mrs. Thrale. I wonder if she sleeps as calmly down there in the Gulf as though she rested where the hickory nuts might fall upon her grave. Do you remember that night when we took turns watching by her couch on the island?"

"Yes," he said, looking into her splendid youthful eyes in which a mysterious light was playing. "Of course I remember it. Something happened that night that I can never forget."

"I know what you mean," she said, her smile deepening.

"No, you don't, dear." He came over close to her and sat on the flat arm of the big porch chair in which she snuggled lazily. "That night—I must confess it before we go any further—that night I kissed you while you were asleep. It was

taking a mean advantage, but I couldn't help it—it was a wild impulse—and—you didn't know."

Her smile spread itself over her lustrous, happy face, and she broke out laughing. He caught her tell-tale eye.

"You didn't *know*?" he cried. "You weren't awake? Were you—really?"

"Yes," she laughed; "I was awake all the time and terribly frightened, too. Weren't you just too dreadful?"

"And you were awake—and *knew*? What did you think of me?"

"Oh, I thought you were the boldest, baddest man I had ever heard of!" she declared.

"Well, I'm glad I was so bold and bad. But mustn't I settle accounts now for my horrible conduct? Yokio isn't looking."

He bent low over her and kissed her just as he had kissed her that night in the moonlight, only that when his lips touched hers there was a warm response, and she looked up at him with joyful, lovelit eyes.

"Why didn't you make this kind of a reply then?" he asked smiling.

"Isn't that just like a man?" she said, pouting prettily. "What would you have thought of me? How should I have dared? Wouldn't it have been ever and ever so unmaidenly?"

"But on my part wasn't it ever and ever so ungentlemanly?"

"Oh, yes; but that's different."

“To be sure it’s very different. Come!” He laid his hand on her arm. “Let’s go for a walk and pick some oranges. Never mind your hat.”

She rose from her chair, put her bare arm in his white-jacketed one and they walked from the patio out through a side door and down the long, cool pathway among the dark-leaved orange trees.

THE END

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